

Gale Contextual  
Encyclopedia of World  
Literature

# Gale Contextual Encyclopedia of World Literature

**VOLUME 2**

D-J



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**Gale Contextual Encyclopedia  
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# Contents

Introduction .....	xxi
Advisory Board .....	xxiii
Chronology .....	xxiv

## **VOLUME 1**

### **A**

<i>Kobo Abe</i> .....	1
<i>Chinua Achebe</i> .....	4
<i>Peter Ackroyd</i> .....	8
<i>Douglas Adams</i> .....	12
<i>Richard Adams</i> .....	16
<i>Aeschylus</i> .....	19
<i>S. Y. Agnon</i> .....	23
<i>Chingiz Aitmatov</i> .....	26
<i>Bella Akhmadulina</i> .....	30
<i>Anna Akhmatova</i> .....	33
<i>Claribel Alegria</i> .....	37
<i>Vicente Aleixandre</i> .....	40
<i>Isabel Allende</i> .....	44
<i>Jorge Amado</i> .....	47
<i>Yehuda Amichai</i> .....	51
<i>Kingsley Amis</i> .....	54
<i>Mulk Raj Anand</i> .....	58
<i>Hans Christian Andersen</i> .....	60



<i>Ivo Andric</i> .....	64
<i>Jean Anouilh</i> .....	68
<i>Paul Antschel</i> .....	71
<i>Guillaume Apollinaire</i> .....	71
<i>Louis Aragon</i> .....	74
<i>Reinaldo Arenas</i> .....	78
<i>José María Arguedas</i> .....	81
<i>Aristophanes</i> .....	84
<i>Aristotle</i> .....	88
<i>Roberto Arlt</i> .....	92
<i>Ayi Kwei Armah</i> .....	95
<i>Matthew Arnold</i> .....	98
<i>François-Marie Arouet</i> .....	102
<i>Juan José Arreola</i> .....	102
<i>Antonin Artaud</i> .....	106
<i>Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis</i> .....	109
<i>Miguel Angel Asturias</i> .....	112
<i>Alaa al Aswany</i> .....	116
<i>Margaret Atwood</i> .....	118
<i>W. H. Auden</i> .....	122
<i>Jacques Audiberti</i> .....	125
<i>Augustine</i> .....	128
<i>Jane Austen</i> .....	131
<b>B</b>	
<i>Li Bai</i> .....	137
<i>Honoré de Balzac</i> .....	137
<i>Julian Barnes</i> .....	140
<i>J. M. Barrie</i> .....	144
<i>Matsuo Bashō</i> .....	147
<i>Charles Baudelaire</i> .....	150
<i>Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais</i> .....	154
<i>Samuel Beckett</i> .....	157
<i>Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer</i> .....	161
<i>Brendan Behan</i> .....	163
<i>Hilaire Belloc</i> .....	166
<i>Jacinto Benavente</i> .....	170
<i>Mario Benedetti</i> .....	174

<i>Mongo Beti</i> .....	177
<i>Adolfo Bioy Casares</i> .....	180
<i>Alexandre Biyidi</i> .....	183
<i>Eric Blair</i> .....	183
<i>William Blake</i> .....	183
<i>Karen Blixen</i> .....	186
<i>Giovanni Boccaccio</i> .....	186
<i>María Luisa Bombal</i> .....	190
<i>Yves Bonnefoy</i> .....	192
<i>Jorge Luis Borges</i> .....	195
<i>Maryse Boucolon</i> .....	199
<i>Elizabeth Bowen</i> .....	199
<i>Bertolt Brecht</i> .....	202
<i>Breyten Breytenbach</i> .....	205
<i>André Brink</i> .....	209
<i>Joseph Brodsky</i> .....	213
<i>Anne Brontë</i> .....	216
<i>Charlotte Brontë</i> .....	219
<i>Emily Brontë</i> .....	223
<i>Rupert Brooke</i> .....	226
<i>Anita Brookner</i> .....	229
<i>Brigid Brophy</i> .....	232
<i>Elizabeth Barrett Browning</i> .....	235
<i>Robert Browning</i> .....	239
<i>Mikhail Bulgakov</i> .....	243
<i>Basil Bunting</i> .....	246
<i>John Bunyan</i> .....	249
<i>Anthony Burgess</i> .....	253
<i>Frances Hodgson Burnett</i> .....	257
<i>Robert Burns</i> .....	260
<i>Samuel Butler</i> .....	263
<i>A. S. Byatt</i> .....	267
<i>Lord Byron</i> .....	269
<b>C</b>	
<i>João Cabral de Melo Neto</i> .....	273
<i>Guillermo Cabrera Infante</i> .....	276

<i>Morley Callaghan</i> .....	279
<i>Italo Calvino</i> .....	282
<i>Thomas Campion</i> .....	286
<i>Albert Camus</i> .....	289
<i>Elias Canetti</i> .....	292
<i>Karel Capek</i> .....	296
<i>Peter Carey</i> .....	299
<i>Thomas Carlyle</i> .....	302
<i>Alejo Carpentier</i> .....	306
<i>Roch Carrier</i> .....	309
<i>Lewis Carroll</i> .....	313
<i>Angela Carter</i> .....	316
<i>Rosalia de Castro</i> .....	319
<i>Constantine Cavafy</i> .....	321
<i>Margaret Cavendish</i> .....	324
<i>Camilo José Cela</i> .....	327
<i>Paul Celan</i> .....	331
<i>Louis-Ferdinand Céline</i> .....	334
<i>Luis Cernuda</i> .....	338
<i>Miguel de Cervantes</i> .....	341
<i>Aimé Césaire</i> .....	344
<i>Mary Challans</i> .....	348
<i>George Chapman</i> .....	348
<i>René Char</i> .....	352
<i>Thomas Chatterton</i> .....	354
<i>Geoffrey Chaucer</i> .....	358
<i>Anton Chekhov</i> .....	362
<i>G. K. Chesterton</i> .....	365
<i>T'ao Ch'ien</i> .....	369
<i>Agatha Christie</i> .....	371
<i>Winston Churchill</i> .....	374
<i>Johnson Pepper Clark-Bekederemo</i> .....	378
<i>Samuel Clemens</i> .....	382
<i>Jean Cocteau</i> .....	382
<i>Andrei Codrescu</i> .....	385
<i>Paulo Coelho</i> .....	389
<i>J. M. Coetzee</i> .....	391

<i>Samuel Taylor Coleridge</i> .....	394
<i>Colette</i> .....	398
<i>Wilkie Collins</i> .....	401
<i>Padraic Colum</i> .....	405
<i>Ivy Compton-Burnett</i> .....	408
<i>Maryse Condé</i> .....	412
<i>Confucius</i> .....	415
<i>William Congreve</i> .....	418
<i>Joseph Conrad</i> .....	422
<i>Pierre Corneille</i> .....	425
<i>Julio Cortázar</i> .....	429
<i>William Cowper</i> .....	432

## VOLUME 2

### D-E

<i>Roald Dahl</i> .....	437
<i>Gabriele d'Annunzio</i> .....	440
<i>Dante Alighieri</i> .....	443
<i>Bei Dao</i> .....	447
<i>Rubén Darío</i> .....	449
<i>Robertson Davies</i> .....	452
<i>Simone de Beauvoir</i> .....	456
<i>Daniel Defoe</i> .....	459
<i>Anita Desai</i> .....	463
<i>Ramón del Valle-Inclán</i> .....	467
<i>Charles Dickens</i> .....	470
<i>Isak Dinesen</i> .....	475
<i>Charles Lutwidge Dodgson</i> .....	479
<i>John Donne</i> .....	479
<i>José Donoso</i> .....	483
<i>Fyodor Dostoevsky</i> .....	486
<i>Arthur Conan Doyle</i> .....	494
<i>Margaret Drabble</i> .....	497
<i>Michael Drayton</i> .....	501
<i>John Dryden</i> .....	504

<i>Maureen Duffy</i> .....	508
<i>Maurice Duggan</i> .....	512
<i>Alexandre Dumas</i> .....	514
<i>Daphne du Maurier</i> .....	519
<i>Lord Dunsany</i> .....	522
<i>Marguerite Duras</i> .....	526
<i>Lawrence Durrell</i> .....	529
<i>Friedrich Dürrenmatt</i> .....	532
<i>Umberto Eco</i> .....	536
<i>Gunnar Ekelöf</i> .....	539
<i>Cyprian Ekwensi</i> .....	543
<i>Mircea Eliade</i> .....	546
<i>George Eliot</i> .....	550
<i>T. S. Eliot</i> .....	553
<i>Odysseus Elytis</i> .....	556
<i>Buchi Emecheta</i> .....	560
<i>Shusaku Endo</i> .....	563
<i>Hans Enzensberger</i> .....	567
<i>Laura Esquivel</i> .....	570
<i>Sir George Etherege</i> .....	572
<i>Euripides</i> .....	575
<i>Mary Ann Evans</i> .....	578
<b>F-G</b>	
<i>Frantz Fanon</i> .....	579
<i>Nuruddin Farah</i> .....	582
<i>George Farquhar</i> .....	586
<i>Georges Feydeau</i> .....	590
<i>Henry Fielding</i> .....	593
<i>Gustave Flaubert</i> .....	597
<i>Ian Fleming</i> .....	601
<i>Dario Fo</i> .....	604
<i>Ken Follett</i> .....	609
<i>C. S. Forester</i> .....	611
<i>E. M. Forster</i> .....	615
<i>Frederick Forsyth</i> .....	619
<i>John Fowles</i> .....	622

<i>Janet Frame</i> .....	625
<i>Anatole France</i> .....	629
<i>Dick Francis</i> .....	632
<i>Anne Frank</i> .....	635
<i>George MacDonald Fraser</i> .....	638
<i>Michael Frayn</i> .....	641
<i>Sigmund Freud</i> .....	645
<i>Brian Friel</i> .....	649
<i>Carlos Fuentes</i> .....	652
<i>Athol Fugard</i> .....	656
<i>John Galsworthy</i> .....	660
<i>Mohandas Gandhi</i> .....	664
<i>Théophile Gautier</i> .....	667
<i>John Gay</i> .....	671
<i>Maurice Gee</i> .....	674
<i>Jean Genet</i> .....	677
<i>Hsadullah Khan Ghalib</i> .....	680
<i>Michel de Ghelderode</i> .....	683
<i>Kahlil Gibran</i> .....	687
<i>André Gide</i> .....	690
<i>Jean Giono</i> .....	694
<i>Jean Giraudoux</i> .....	697
<i>Johann Wolfgang von Goethe</i> .....	700
<i>Nikolai Gogol</i> .....	704
<i>William Golding</i> .....	708
<i>Carlo Goldoni</i> .....	711
<i>Oliver Goldsmith</i> .....	714
<i>Witold Gombrowicz</i> .....	718
<i>Nadine Gordimer</i> .....	722
<i>Maxim Gorky</i> .....	726
<i>Patricia Grace</i> .....	729
<i>Kenneth Grahame</i> .....	732
<i>Günter Grass</i> .....	735
<i>Robert Graves</i> .....	738
<i>Thomas Gray</i> .....	742

<i>Graham Greene</i> .....	745
<i>Nicolás Guillén</i> .....	748
<b>H-J</b>	
<i>Thomas Hardy</i> .....	753
<i>Jaroslav Hašek</i> .....	756
<i>Gerhart Hauptmann</i> .....	760
<i>Václav Havel</i> .....	763
<i>Bessie Head</i> .....	767
<i>Seamus Heaney</i> .....	771
<i>Lafcadio Hearn</i> .....	774
<i>George Herbert</i> .....	777
<i>Robert Herrick</i> .....	781
<i>James Herriot</i> .....	784
<i>Hermann Hesse</i> .....	787
<i>Nazim Hikmet</i> .....	791
<i>Rolf Hochhuth</i> .....	794
<i>Fritz Hochwaelder</i> .....	798
<i>Peter Hoeg</i> .....	800
<i>Homer</i> .....	803
<i>Gerard Manley Hopkins</i> .....	806
<i>Nick Hornby</i> .....	810
<i>A. E. Housman</i> .....	812
<i>Ted Hughes</i> .....	816
<i>Victor Hugo</i> .....	819
<i>Aldous Huxley</i> .....	823
<i>Henrik Ibsen</i> .....	826
<i>Eugene Ionesco</i> .....	830
<i>Christopher Isherwood</i> .....	834
<i>Kazuo Ishiguro</i> .....	837
<i>Kobayashi Issa</i> .....	840
<i>Alfred Jarry</i> .....	841
<i>Elfriede Jelinek</i> .....	844
<i>Juan Ramón Jiménez</i> .....	847
<i>Samuel Johnson</i> .....	851
<i>Ben Jonson</i> .....	855
<i>James Joyce</i> .....	859

**VOLUME 3****K-L**

<i>Franz Kafka</i> .....	865
<i>Yasunari Kawabata</i> .....	869
<i>Nikos Kazantzakis</i> .....	872
<i>John Keats</i> .....	876
<i>Thomas Keneally</i> .....	879
<i>Kenzaburo Oe</i> .....	883
<i>Imre Kertész</i> .....	887
<i>Omar Khayyám</i> .....	890
<i>Thomas Kinsella</i> .....	893
<i>Rudyard Kipling</i> .....	896
<i>A. M. Klein</i> .....	900
<i>Heinrich von Kleist</i> .....	904
<i>Ivan Klíma</i> .....	907
<i>Joy Kogawa</i> .....	911
<i>Milan Kundera</i> .....	914
<i>Hari Kunzru</i> .....	918
<i>Thomas Kyd</i> .....	920
<i>Paer Lagerkvist</i> .....	923
<i>Alex La Guma</i> .....	926
<i>Alphonse de Lamartine</i> .....	930
<i>Charles Lamb</i> .....	933
<i>Philip Larkin</i> .....	937
<i>D. H. Lawrence</i> .....	940
<i>Camara Laye</i> .....	943
<i>Irving Layton</i> .....	947
<i>Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu</i> .....	950
<i>Leonid Leonov</i> .....	954
<i>Doris Lessing</i> .....	957
<i>Primo Levi</i> .....	961
<i>C.S. Lewis</i> .....	964
<i>José Lezama Lima</i> .....	968
<i>Federico García Lorca</i> .....	971
<i>John Lyly</i> .....	975



## M

<i>Niccolò Machiavelli</i> .....	979
<i>Alistair MacLean</i> .....	982
<i>Maurice Maeterlinck</i> .....	986
<i>Jayanta Mahapatra</i> .....	989
<i>Naguib Mahfouz</i> .....	992
<i>Stéphane Mallarmé</i> .....	995
<i>Thomas Malory</i> .....	999
<i>David Malouf</i> .....	1002
<i>André Malraux</i> .....	1005
<i>Demetrio Aguilera Malta</i> .....	1009
<i>Osip Mandelstam</i> .....	1012
<i>Thomas Mann</i> .....	1016
<i>Katherine Mansfield</i> .....	1020
<i>Kamala Markandaya</i> .....	1022
<i>Christopher Marlowe</i> .....	1025
<i>Gabriel García Márquez</i> .....	1029
<i>Ngaio Marsh</i> .....	1033
<i>Yann Martel</i> .....	1036
<i>Andrew Marvell</i> .....	1038
<i>Karl Marx</i> .....	1042
<i>W. Somerset Maugham</i> .....	1047
<i>Guy de Maupassant</i> .....	1050
<i>Vladimir Mayakovsky</i> .....	1053
<i>John McCrae</i> .....	1056
<i>Ian McEwan</i> .....	1059
<i>Menander</i> .....	1063
<i>George Meredith</i> .....	1066
<i>Thomas Middleton</i> .....	1070
<i>A. A. Milne</i> .....	1074
<i>Czesław Miłosz</i> .....	1077
<i>John Milton</i> .....	1080
<i>Yukio Mishima</i> .....	1084
<i>Gabriela Mistral</i> .....	1088
<i>Thomas Mofolo</i> .....	1091
<i>Molière</i> .....	1094

<i>Michel de Montaigne</i> .....	1098
<i>Eugenio Montale</i> .....	1101
<i>Lucy Maud Montgomery</i> .....	1105
<i>Henry de Montherlant</i> .....	1108
<i>Paul Muldoon</i> .....	1111
<i>Alice Munro</i> .....	1113
<i>H. H. Munro</i> .....	1117
<i>Haruki Murakami</i> .....	1117
<i>Iris Murdoch</i> .....	1120
<i>Les Murray</i> .....	1123
<b>N-Q</b>	
<i>Vladimir Nabokov</i> .....	1127
<i>V. S. Naipaul</i> .....	1131
<i>R. K. Narayan</i> .....	1134
<i>Irène Némirovsky</i> .....	1138
<i>Pablo Neruda</i> .....	1141
<i>Edith Nesbit</i> .....	1144
<i>Ngugi wa Thiong'o</i> .....	1147
<i>Friedrich Nietzsche</i> .....	1151
<i>Josephina Niggli</i> .....	1156
<i>Anaïs Nin</i> .....	1158
<i>Lewis Nkosi</i> .....	1162
<i>Nevil Shute Norway</i> .....	1164
<i>Silvina Ocampo</i> .....	1164
<i>Sean O'Casey</i> .....	1167
<i>Christopher Okigbo</i> .....	1170
<i>Ben Okri</i> .....	1173
<i>Michael Ondaatje</i> .....	1177
<i>Juan Carlos Onetti</i> .....	1180
<i>George Orwell</i> .....	1183
<i>Ovid</i> .....	1187
<i>Amos Oz</i> .....	1190
<i>José Emilio Pacheco</i> .....	1194
<i>Orhan Pamuk</i> .....	1197
<i>Nicanor Parra</i> .....	1200
<i>Pier Paolo Pasolini</i> .....	1204

<i>Boris Pasternak</i> .....	1207
<i>Alan Paton</i> .....	1211
<i>Octavio Paz</i> .....	1214
<i>Okot p'Bitek</i> .....	1217
<i>Samuel Pepys</i> .....	1220
<i>Arturo Pérez-Reverte</i> .....	1224
<i>Francesco Petrarck</i> .....	1227
<i>Arturo Uslar Pietri</i> .....	1230
<i>Harold Pinter</i> .....	1234
<i>Luigi Pirandello</i> .....	1237
<i>Plato</i> .....	1240
<i>Li Po</i> .....	1245
<i>Elena Poniatowska</i> .....	1248
<i>Alexander Pope</i> .....	1251
<i>Jean-Baptiste Poquelin</i> .....	1254
<i>Terry Pratchett</i> .....	1255
<i>Marcel Proust</i> .....	1257
<i>Alexander Pushkin</i> .....	1260
<i>Tao Qian</i> .....	1264
<b>R</b>	
<i>François Rabelais</i> .....	1265
<i>Jean Racine</i> .....	1269
<i>Terence Rattigan</i> .....	1272
<i>Dahlia Ravikovitch</i> .....	1275
<i>Erich Paul Remark</i> .....	1278
<i>Erich Maria Remarque</i> .....	1278
<i>Mary Renault</i> .....	1281
<i>Samuel Richardson</i> .....	1284
<i>Mordecai Richler</i> .....	1288
<i>Rainer Maria Rilke</i> .....	1291
<i>Arthur Rimbaud</i> .....	1294
<i>Augusto Roa Bastos</i> .....	1298
<i>Alain Robbe-Grillet</i> .....	1302
<i>T. W. Robertson</i> .....	1305
<i>Pierre de Ronsard</i> .....	1308
<i>Christina Rossetti</i> .....	1311

<i>Dante Gabriel Rossetti</i> .....	1315
<i>Edmond Rostand</i> .....	1318
<i>Jacques Roumain</i> .....	1322
<i>Jean-Jacques Rousseau</i> .....	1325
<i>J. K. Rowling</i> .....	1330
<i>Tadeusz Rozewicz</i> .....	1332
<i>Juan Rulfo</i> .....	1336
<i>Rumi</i> .....	1339
<i>Salman Rushdie</i> .....	1341

## VOLUME 4

### S

<i>Thomas Sackville</i> .....	1347
<i>Antoine de Saint-Exupéry</i> .....	1350
<i>Saki</i> .....	1354
<i>George Sand</i> .....	1357
<i>Sappho</i> .....	1361
<i>José Saramago</i> .....	1364
<i>Jean-Paul Sartre</i> .....	1367
<i>Siegfried Sassoon</i> .....	1370
<i>Marjane Satrapi</i> .....	1374
<i>Friedrich von Schiller</i> .....	1376
<i>Olive Schreiner</i> .....	1380
<i>Bruno Schulz</i> .....	1383
<i>Walter Scott</i> .....	1386
<i>Eugène Scribe</i> .....	1389
<i>George Seferis</i> .....	1393
<i>Jaroslav Seifert</i> .....	1396
<i>Seneca</i> .....	1399
<i>Léopold Sédar Senghor</i> .....	1403
<i>William Shakespeare</i> .....	1407
<i>George Bernard Shaw</i> .....	1411
<i>Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley</i> .....	1415
<i>Percy Bysshe Shelley</i> .....	1419
<i>Richard Brinsley Sheridan</i> .....	1423
<i>Mikhail Sholokhov</i> .....	1426

<i>Zhou Shuren</i> .....	1430
<i>Nevil Shute</i> .....	1430
<i>Sir Philip Sidney</i> .....	1434
<i>Alan Sillitoe</i> .....	1437
<i>Georges Simenon</i> .....	1440
<i>Claude Simon</i> .....	1443
<i>Edith Sitwell</i> .....	1446
<i>Josef Skvorecky</i> .....	1449
<i>Christopher Smart</i> .....	1453
<i>Alexander McCall Smith</i> .....	1456
<i>Mario Soldati</i> .....	1459
<i>Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn</i> .....	1462
<i>Sophocles</i> .....	1465
<i>Wole Soyinka</i> .....	1468
<i>Muriel Spark</i> .....	1472
<i>Stephen Spender</i> .....	1475
<i>Edmund Spenser</i> .....	1479
<i>Gertrude Stein</i> .....	1483
<i>Stendhal</i> .....	1486
<i>Laurence Sterne</i> .....	1490
<i>Robert Louis Stevenson</i> .....	1494
<i>Bram Stoker</i> .....	1497
<i>Tom Stoppard</i> .....	1500
<i>Alfonsina Storni</i> .....	1504
<i>August Strindberg</i> .....	1508
<i>Rosemary Sutcliff</i> .....	1512
<i>Jonathan Swift</i> .....	1515
<i>Algernon Charles Swinburne</i> .....	1518
<i>John Millington Synge</i> .....	1522
<i>Wisława Szymborska</i> .....	1526
<b>T-V</b>	
<i>Rabindranath Tagore</i> .....	1531
<i>Alfred, Lord Tennyson</i> .....	1535
<i>William Makepeace Thackeray</i> .....	1539
<i>Dylan Thomas</i> .....	1543
<i>J.R.R. Tolkien</i> .....	1546

<i>Leo Tolstoy</i> .....	1549
<i>Michel Tournier</i> .....	1553
<i>Georg Trakl</i> .....	1556
<i>Tomas Tranströmer</i> .....	1559
<i>Michel Tremblay</i> .....	1563
<i>Anthony Trollope</i> .....	1566
<i>Leon Trotsky</i> .....	1570
<i>Marina Tsvetaeva</i> .....	1574
<i>Tu Fu</i> .....	1577
<i>Ivan Turgenev</i> .....	1580
<i>Amos Tutuola</i> .....	1583
<i>Tristan Tzara</i> .....	1587
<i>Miguel de Unamuno</i> .....	1590
<i>Sigrid Undset</i> .....	1593
<i>Luisa Valenzuela</i> .....	1597
<i>Paul Valéry</i> .....	1600
<i>W. D. Valgardson</i> .....	1603
<i>César Vallejo</i> .....	1606
<i>Mario Vargas Llosa</i> .....	1610
<i>Vergil</i> .....	1613
<i>Paul Verlaine</i> .....	1616
<i>Jules Verne</i> .....	1620
<i>Alfred de Vigny</i> .....	1624
<i>Elio Vittorini</i> .....	1627
<i>Voltaire</i> .....	1630
<i>Andrei Voznesensky</i> .....	1634
<b>W-Z</b>	
<i>Derek Walcott</i> .....	1637
<i>Edmund Waller</i> .....	1641
<i>Hugh Walpole</i> .....	1644
<i>Evelyn Waugh</i> .....	1648
<i>John Webster</i> .....	1651
<i>Simone Weil</i> .....	1654
<i>H. G. Wells</i> .....	1658
<i>Rebecca West</i> .....	1662
<i>Patrick White</i> .....	1665

<i>Elie Wiesel</i> .....	1669
<i>James Alfred Wight</i> .....	1672
<i>Oscar Wilde</i> .....	1672
<i>Charles Williams</i> .....	1677
<i>Emlyn Williams</i> .....	1680
<i>Raymond Williams</i> .....	1684
<i>Angus Wilson</i> .....	1688
<i>Colin Wilson</i> .....	1691
<i>Jeanette Winterson</i> .....	1694
<i>P. G. Wodehouse</i> .....	1697
<i>Virginia Woolf</i> .....	1701
<i>William Wordsworth</i> .....	1705
<i>Judith Wright</i> .....	1708
<i>William Wycherley</i> .....	1711
<i>Gao Xingjian</i> .....	1714
<i>Lu Xun</i> .....	1718
<i>Koizumi Yakumo</i> .....	1721
<i>William Butler Yeats</i> .....	1722
<i>A. B. Yehoshua</i> .....	1725
<i>Yevgeny Yevtushenko</i> .....	1729
<i>Charlotte Yonge</i> .....	1732
<i>Marguerite Yourcenar</i> .....	1735
<i>Tao Yuanming</i> .....	1739
<i>Émile Zola</i> .....	1739
<i>Mikhail Zoshchenko</i> .....	1742
Glossary of Literary Terms .....	xxvii
Index .....	xxxiii

# Introduction

## How to Use This Book

The *Gale Contextual Encyclopedia of World Literature* is a resource for students who seek information beyond the simple biographical details of an author's life or a brief overview of the author's major works. This book is designed to offer a comprehensive view of how an author's work fits within the context of the author's life, historical events, and the literary world. This allows for a greater understanding of both the author's work and the cultural and historical environment in which it was created.

The *Gale Contextual Encyclopedia of World Literature* is divided into entries, each focused on a particular writer who has made significant contributions to world literature. In some cases, these individuals may be known primarily for contributions outside the realm of literature. Karl Marx and Mohandas Gandhi, for example, are two figures famous for their political activism; in another realm, Jean Cocteau and Pier Paolo Pasolini are two writers better known in modern times for their groundbreaking work in film. However, all of these figures have, aside from their other accomplishments, created significant works of literature that have stood the test of time and affected readers beyond the borders of their own cultures.

This book is best used not just to locate the facts of a writer's life and work, but as a way to understand the social, literary, and historical environment in which the writer lived and created. By understanding the context of the writer's work, you are more likely to recognize key themes and stylistic traits as elements of larger trends in the literary world, as well as understand the impact of historical events from a new and unique perspective.

## Sections Found within Each Entry in This Book

Each entry in this book is divided into three main parts: Works in Biographical and Historical Context; Works in Literary Context; and Works in Critical Context. These sections are discussed below.

In addition, each entry includes: a Key Facts section, containing birth/death date information as well as a list of major works; a Responses to Literature section, containing discussion and writing activities related to the author in question; a Further Reading



section that includes bibliographic citations as well as reputable sources of additional material about the author in the form of books, periodicals, or Web sites; a Literary and Historical Contemporaries sidebar, listing several famous contemporaries of the author; and a Common Human Experience sidebar, offering examples of other literary or artistic works that share themes or techniques with those by the subject of the entry.

***Works in Biographical and Historical Context*** In this section, you will find information about how events and concerns in the author's life helped to shape the author's work. For example, Russian author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's experiences in a Soviet labor camp led him to write *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973), while his experiences battling cancer inspired his novel *Cancer Ward* (1968). This section also includes information on historical events or trends that had an effect on the author. For example, the scientific and technological advancements of the nineteenth century greatly influenced the subject matter of the works of Jules Verne, which primarily focused on "fanciful" scientific achievements such as a journey to the moon.

***Works in Literary Context*** In this section, you will find information about how the author's work fits within the context of the body of literature as a whole. This may include a description of a stylistic trait exhibited in the author's writing; for example, the literary technique known as "stream of consciousness" is a defining characteristic of much of the fiction of Virginia Woolf, and information on the technique—as well as examples of how the author used it—can be found in her entry. This section may also include a discussion of the writer's work as it exists within a specific genre, such as Gothic fiction or Surrealist poetry. Finally, the Works in Literary Context section may contain information of specific themes commonly found in the author's work. The writings of Aimé Césaire, for example, frequently address the theme of race relations in colonial regions.

***Works in Critical Context*** In this section, you will find a survey of critical and popular opinion related to the author and the author's most important works. The emphasis is on contemporary opinions, or those formed by readers and critics at the time the author's work was first published. In some cases, critical or popular opinion from the time of publication may not be available; this may be due to the passage of time, as with some ancient Greek and Roman authors, or due to the writer's lack of fame during his or her own lifetime. This section also includes information on how critical or popular opinion on an author has changed over time. Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling, for example, have been taken to task by some modern critics for their depictions of race in their most highly regarded works. Some authors popular during their own time, such as Samuel Richardson, have fallen from favor among modern readers, while others virtually unknown during their lifetimes have become part of the classic literary canon.

### **Other Information Contained in This Book**

In addition to the entries for individual authors, this book also contains a chronology that indicates some major historical events related to the development of world literature. At the end of the book, you will find a glossary of terms—primarily literary and historical in nature—that are used in various entries throughout the book, along with a brief explanation of each term.

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# Chronology

This chronology contains a brief overview of some of the major events in the history of world literature. This includes the development of technologies and tools that advanced the writing and publishing process, as well as some significant historical events that had an impact on the development of literature.

## 2100 BCE–499 CE

*c.* 2100 BCE

The earliest existing fragments of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, widely recognized as the first epic documented in written form, are recorded on clay tablets by ancient Sumerians.

*c.* 1600 BCE

The first known example of a literary story documented on papyrus, a durable paper-like material made from the fibrous stem of the papyrus plant, is written by ancient Egyptians.

*c.* 1050 BCE

The Phoenician alphabet, the first widely used alphabetic writing system in the world, is developed from older scripts that included Egyptian hieroglyphics.

*c.* 850 BCE

Homer, credited as the author of the first ancient Greek epics in written form, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, is believed to have lived.

472 BCE

Aeschylus's play *The Persians*, the oldest surviving example of an ancient Greek tragedy, was first performed.

425 BCE

*The Acharnians*, a play by Aristophanes and the oldest surviving example of ancient Greek comedy, is first performed.

*c.* 190 BCE

The production of parchment, a writing surface derived from animal skin, is refined into an easily produced method in the ancient Greek city of Pergamum, effectively ending the dominance of papyrus.

*c.* 300 CE

Kālidāsa, Indian playwright and one of the foremost literary figures of the Sanskrit language, is believed to have lived.

397 CE

Augustine of Hippo, a North African bishop, begins publication of his *Confessions*, generally regarded as the first autobiography and the first example of confessional literature.

## 500–1499

*c.* 794

The first paper mill begins operation in Baghdad, in modern-day Iraq. Over the course of several centuries, wood pulp-based paper replaces parchment as the dominant writing surface throughout the world.

868

The *Diamond Sutra* is published in China; printed using woodblock printing methods, this publication is the oldest known printed book in existence.

1021

*The Tale of Genji*, a Japanese work attributed to Murasaki Shikibu, is published. The work becomes a landmark in Japanese literature.

and is often cited as one of the earliest books to resemble the modern novel.

- 1048 Omar Khayyam, a Persian mathematician and poet, is born. His poetic works are later collected—along with some works of suspect attribution—in *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, a key work of Persian literature.
- c. 1220 Snorri Sturluson creates the first comprehensive written collection of Norse mythology with the completion of the *Prose Edda*.
- 1265 Italian poet Dante Alighieri, creator of the epic known as *The Divine Comedy*, is born.
- 1439 German metalworker Johann Gutenberg creates the first functional printing press, resulting in the ability to mass-produce copies of literature easily and cheaply instead of by hand.

### 1500–1799

- 1558 Queen Elizabeth I assumes the throne of England, marking the beginning of the Elizabethan Age, a period of forty-five years during which significant advancements in English poetry and drama occurred.
- 1564 William Shakespeare, generally acknowledged by modern readers as the greatest dramatist in the history of the English language, is born.
- 1605 The first volume of *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes is published. Written in Spanish, *Don Quixote* is widely considered to be the first modern novel.
- 1649 The Puritan-led British Commonwealth Parliament, in control after the overthrow of the British monarchy, bans theatrical productions throughout England due to the purported indecency of dramatic works. The ban would last until 1680, and would be followed by an explosion of theatrical development during the period known as the Restoration.
- 1719 *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe is published; this book is often regarded as the first true novel of the English language.
- 1798 *Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems*, a poetic collection by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, is pub-

lished, marking for many the beginning of the Romantic movement in English literature.

### 1800–Today

- 1856 Gustave Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary* is published in serial form, leading to an obscenity trial over its contents. *Madame Bovary* is considered by many to be the key work that launched the Realism movement in literature.
- 1857 Novelist Charles Dickens founds *All the Year Round*, one of many inexpensive British serial magazines that make literature available to virtually all levels of social class; *All the Year Round* subsequently features the first publication of the Dickens novels *Great Expectations* and *A Tale of Two Cities*.
- 1873 Production begins on the first commercially successful typewriter by E. Remington and Sons, which will allow writers to produce work substantially more quickly and more neatly than writing by hand.
- 1922 James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* and T. S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land" are both published, defining for many the Modernist literary movement.
- 1924 André Breton publishes his *Surrealist Manifesto*, launching an avant-garde literary and artistic movement characterized by a celebration of the irrational.
- 1932 Joseph Stalin, dictatorial leader of the Soviet Union, decrees that socialist realism—an artistic style in which the working class and government leaders are praised—is the only government-approved art style. Writers and artists who create controversial works are censored and placed into labor camps; a secret distribution system known as *samizdat* is created to preserve and share censored works among dissenting intellectuals.
- 1950 Eugène Ionesco's play *The Bald Soprano* debuts in Paris, launching the theatrical movement known as Theater of the Absurd.
- 1992 The World Wide Web, an interlinking structure designed by Sir Tim Berners-Lee for viewing cross-referenced multimedia documents from any location through data transfer, is officially released.

# D-E

## Roald Dahl

BORN: 1916, Llandaff, South Wales

DIED: 1990, Oxford, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Novels, short stories

MAJOR WORKS:

*Over to You: Ten Stories of Flyers and Flying*  
(1946)

*James and the Giant Peach* (1961)

*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964)

*The BFG* (1982)

*Matilda* (1988)

### Overview

A writer of both children's fiction and short stories for adults, Roald Dahl (1916–1990) is best known as the author of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Dahl's works for children have been praised as skillfully crafted, with fast-paced plots, captivating detail, and onomatopoeic words that lend themselves to being read aloud. His adult-oriented short stories are noted for their dark humor, surprise endings, and subtle horror. Whether writing for juveniles or an adult audience, Dahl has been described as a master of story construction with a remarkable ability to weave a tale.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

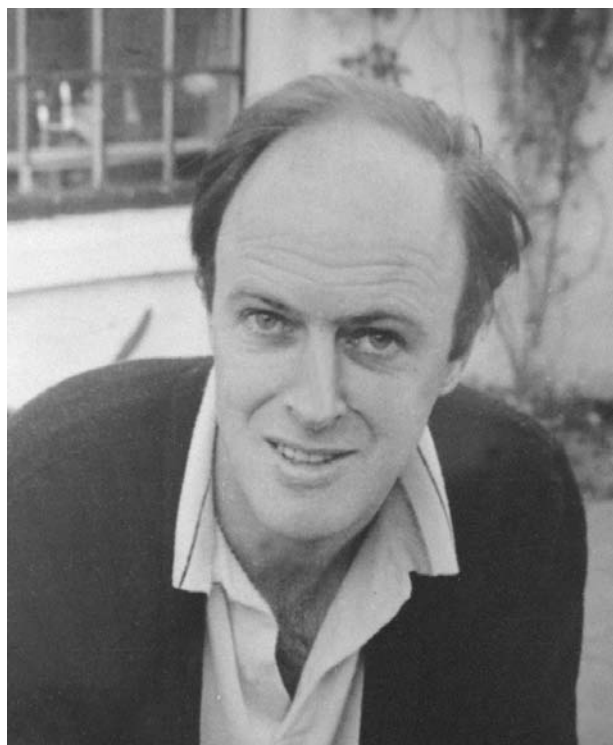
***Boarding School: Source of Darkness*** Dahl was born in Llandaff, South Wales, to Norwegian parents and spent his childhood summers visiting his grandparents in Oslo, Norway. After his father died when Dahl was four, his mother honored her late husband's wish that Dahl be sent to English schools. Dahl subsequently attended Llandaff Cathedral School, where he began a series of academic misadventures. After he and several

other students were severely beaten by the headmaster for placing a dead mouse in a cruel storekeeper's candy jar, Dahl's mother moved him to St. Peter's Boarding School and later to Repton, a renowned private school.

Later, Dahl recalled in his short autobiographical story "Lucky Break" that the "beatings at Repton were more fierce and more frequent than anything I had yet experienced." Standing six feet, six inches tall, Dahl played soccer and served as the captain of the squash and handball teams but did not excel in academics. One teacher commented on the fourteen-year-old boy's English composition work: "I have never met a boy who so persistently writes the exact opposite of what he means. He seems incapable of marshaling his thoughts on paper." One year later, another comment on an English composition of Dahl's read: "A persistent muddler. Vocabulary negligible, sentences mal-constructed. He reminds me of a camel." Dahl would later describe his school years as "days of horrors" that inspired much of his macabre fiction.

***Plane Crash: An Unusual Beginning*** Dahl was flying over the African desert for the Royal Air Force during World War II when he was forced to make an emergency landing. He was rescued by another pilot and transported to a hospital in Alexandria, Egypt. His skull was fractured and plastic surgery was necessary to repair the damage to his nose. Six months later, he had recuperated to the point that he could fly a Hurricane fighter with his squadron in Greece against the Germans. Dahl shot down four enemy planes, and his own plane was one of the four out of the thirty Hurricanes in that campaign to survive. Then, as Dahl's old injuries began to cause dangerous blackouts when he flew, he returned to England. At a club one night, he met the undersecretary of state for Air, Harold Balfour, and Balfour gave Dahl his next post as an assistant air attaché in Washington, D.C.

While it took Dahl six months to recover—and he would live with the recurrent pain of his injuries for the rest of his life—Dahl's crash landing set him on a course



Roald Dahl Dahl, Roald, photograph by Eli Wallach. The Library of Congress.

that led him to his career as a writer. Wanting to write about Dahl's most exciting war experience for a *Saturday Evening Post* article, reporter C. S. Forester interviewed Dahl over lunch one day in Washington. Because Forester could not eat and take notes at the same time, Dahl offered to write some notes later for the journalist. Those notes became the story "A Piece of Cake," the first of Dahl's work to bring him money and recognition. Dahl went on to write a number of stories for adults about being a fighter pilot.

In Dahl's first book for children, he did not stray far from the fighter-pilot stories he had created for adults. *The Gremlins* tells the story of evil little men who caused war planes to crash. After these beings are discovered, they are convinced to work for the pilots instead of against them. *The Gremlins* was a popular success. After First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt read the book to her children, she invited Dahl to dinner at the White House. Walt Disney was so taken with the story that he planned to transform it into a motion picture. In the *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review*, May Lamberton Becker advised her readers to preserve *The Gremlins* "as a firsthand source book on the origin of a genuine addition to folklore. That is, preserve it if the children in the family don't read it to bits . . ."

**Father and Storyteller** The births of Dahl's children provided him an opportunity to tell the children bedtime stories, a practice that allowed the author to develop his

understanding of the kind of stories children enjoyed. In an article for *The Writer*, Dahl observed that children love suspense, action, magic, "new inventions," "secret information," and "seeing the villain meet a grisly death." According to Dahl, children "hate descriptive passages and flowery prose," and "can spot a clumsy sentence." As Dahl's children grew older, he wrote both *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the story of a poor boy who is selected to be the new owner of a world-famous chocolate factory, and *James and the Giant Peach*, which recounts the fantastic tale of a young boy who travels thousands of miles in a house-sized peach with as bizarre an assemblage of companions as can be found in a children's book.

## Works in Literary Context

**Revenge and Violence** One way that Dahl delights his readers is by exacting often vicious revenge on cruel adults who harm children. In *Matilda*, the Amazonian headmistress Miss Trunchbull, who deals with unruly children by grabbing them by the hair and tossing them out windows, is finally banished by the brilliant Matilda. *The Witches*, released as a movie in 1990, finds the heroic young character, who has been turned into a mouse, thwarting the hideous and diabolical witches' plans to kill all the children of England. But even innocent adults receive rough treatment. In *James and the Giant Peach*, parents are eaten by a rhinoceros, and aunts are flattened by the eponymous giant peach. In *The Witches*, parents are killed in car crashes, and pleasant fathers are murdered in *Matilda*.

However, Dahl explained in the *New York Times Book Review* that the children who wrote to him "invariably pick out the most gruesome events as the favorite parts of the books. . . . They don't relate it to life. They enjoy the fantasy. And my nastiness is never gratuitous. It's retribution. Beastly people must be punished."

**Dahl's Writings for Adults** *Over to You: Ten Stories of Flyers and Flying* is a collection of Dahl's early stories. One tale especially, "They Shall Not Grow Old," is a much more polished story than one would expect from a relatively inexperienced writer. A notable aspect of this piece, also seen in several of the other stories in the book, is the clear influence of Ernest Hemingway on the young writer's style.

Critics have compared much of Dahl's adult-oriented fiction to the works of Guy de Maupassant, O. Henry, and Saki. Praised by commentators as well crafted and suspenseful, Dahl's stories employ surprise endings and shrewd characters who are rarely what they seem to be. Dahl also experimented with comic themes in his novel *My Uncle Oswald*. The title character, Oswald Hendryks Cornelius, is a charming man of the world who embarks upon a business venture to collect and preserve semen samples from geniuses and royalty, hoping wealthy women who desire superior offspring will want to be his clients. Like Dahl's short stories, *My Uncle Oswald* features duplicitous characters, and some critics have

observed that it shares a common theme with much of his short fiction: a depiction of the superficial nature of modern civilization.

### Works in Critical Context

***Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*** *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is Dahl's most popular and most controversial children's story. Many critics have censured this work for its alleged stereotyping and inhumanity, and have accused Dahl of racism for his portrayal of the Oompa-Loompas. In the original version of the story, the Oompa-Loompas are described as black pygmies from deepest Africa who sing and dance and work for nearly nothing. In a revised edition, Dahl changed their appearance and gave them a mythical homeland. Still, claims of prejudice persist. In *Now Upon a Time: A Contemporary View of Children's Literature*, Myra Pollack Sadker and David Miller Sadker criticized *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* for its "ageism": "The message with which we close the book is that the needs and desires and opinions of old people are totally irrelevant and inconsequential."

The publication and popularity of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* evoked criticism from experts in children's literature who thought that the violence, insensitivity, or supposed racism in the text was offensive or inappropriate for children. Many critics have objected to the rough treatment of adults. Eleanor Cameron, for example, in *Children's Literature in Education*, found that "Dahl caters to the streak of sadism in children which they don't even realize is there because they are not fully self-aware and are not experienced enough to understand what sadism is." "It is difficult to avoid the feeling that Dahl . . . enjoys writing about violence, while at the same time condemning it," remarked David Rees in *Children's Literature in Education*, adding: "Dahl . . . parades his own irritations—television addiction . . . overindulgence in sweets, gum-chewing, shooting foxes, beards, ugly faces, fat bodies, cranky old people, spoiled children—and presents them as moral objections." Dahl's supporters have argued that in *Charlie*, as in his other children's books, Dahl follows the traditional fairy tale style, which includes extreme exaggeration and the swift and horrible destruction of evildoers; they contend that children are not harmed by this approach. Critic Alasdair Campbell, writing in *School Librarian*, argued that "normal children are bound to take some interest in the darker side of human nature, and books for them should be judged not by picking out separate elements but rather on the basis of their overall balance and effect."

If critics disagreed about the suitability of some of Dahl's books for children, most agreed that Dahl was a talented writer. According to Michael Wood of *New Society*, "Dahl is at his best when he reveals the horrible thinness of much of our respectability; at his worst and most tiresome when he nudges us towards the contemplation of mere naughtiness . . . what is striking about Dahl's work,

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Dahl's famous contemporaries include:

**Eleanor Roosevelt** (1884–1962): First Lady of the United States from 1933 to 1945, Eleanor Roosevelt was a key figure in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal policy, which helped the United States survive the Great Depression.

**C. S. Lewis** (1898–1963): Lewis is best known for *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1965), which present the adventures of children who play central roles in the unfolding history of the fictional realm of Narnia, a place where animals talk, magic is common, and good battles evil.

**Ernest Hemingway** (1899–1961): Just as Dahl's earliest work was inspired by his experience in World War II, this American novelist's writing is largely inspired by his service in World War I.

**Pablo Picasso** (1881–1973): This Spanish artist worked in a variety of media, including paint and ceramics, and he is often associated with the cubist art movement.

both for children and adults, is its carefully pitched appeal to its different audiences . . . . He has tact, timing, a clean, economic style, an abundance of ingenuity . . . above all he knows how to manipulate his readers."

### Responses to Literature

1. Read one of Dahl's children's books and read one of his short stories written for an adult audience. What are some of the key differences between the "voices" of these texts? (Consider the words Dahl uses, the themes the works focus on, and the action within the texts.)
2. Read *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Consider why Willy Wonka decides to give the chocolate factory to Charlie? If you were Willy Wonka, would you have chosen Charlie? What would have happened to the factory if Willy Wonka had chosen another child?

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## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Roald Dahl suffered a terrifying crash while a member of the Royal Air Force during World War II. Much of his adult-oriented literature deals with war and its effects on human beings. Following is a list of other texts that focus on the mental and emotional toll of war:

"I Will Fight No More Forever" (1877), by Chief Joseph. This famous speech was given by Nez Percé chief Joseph upon his surrender to the U.S. Army.

"Dulce Et Decorum Est" (1920), by Wilfred Owen. Owen, a soldier in World War I, wrote this poetic rebuttal to a line from Horace that claimed it is "sweet and appropriate" that a young man should die in war for his country.

*The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), a film directed by William Wyler. This Academy Award-winning film tells the story of three servicemen and the complications and struggles they face upon returning home after World War II.

*In the Lake of the Woods* (1994), by Tim O'Brien. In this novel, the protagonist, John Wade, is a Vietnam veteran who continues to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, which causes him to experience bouts of rage, perhaps resulting in the murder of his wife.

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## Gabriele d'Annunzio

BORN: 1863, Pescara, Italy

DIED: 1938, Gardone, Italy

NATIONALITY: Italian

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

*New Song* (1882)

*The Child of Pleasure* (1888)

*The Daughter of Jorio* (1904)

*Halcyon* (1904)

## Overview

Italian novelist, poet, dramatist, and political agitator, Gabriele d'Annunzio is one of the most flamboyant personalities of twentieth-century literature. The press reported his romantic scandals, and scholars criticized the moral delinquency of his works. Nevertheless, d'Annunzio was celebrated in his lifetime as one of Italy's greatest authors, an accomplished stylist who combined the poetic splendor of Dante and other classical writers with such literary movements as naturalism, Symbolism, and Decadence.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Father's Influence Provides Opportunities for Education** D'Annunzio was born March 12, 1863, in the small town of Pescara on the Adriatic coast in central Italy. His father, a prosperous landowner and a dealer in wine and agricultural products, became mayor of the town. His wealth and influence allowed d'Annunzio the opportunity to study with private tutors and to be educated in Latin by priests of the local diocese. Later, d'Annunzio was educated in a prominent boarding school in Prato: the Liceo Cicognini.

**Uninhibited Poetry Brings Success** A precocious child, d'Annunzio excelled at Latin and Greek. At the age of sixteen, he wrote his first collection of verse, *Primo Vere* (1879; In Early Spring), which was published by his father. Because of its uninhibited approach to sexual themes, the poems were a commercial hit; because of their linguistic skill, they were a critical success. After graduating from Cicognini in 1881, d'Annunzio attended the University of Rome and began writing for newspapers. The following year, he published *Terra vergine* (1882; Virgin Land), a collection of regional stories, and *Canto novo* (1882; New Song), a collection of poetry that contains details of his first romantic relationship. In 1883, he married the duchess Maria Hardouin de Gallese, with whom he had three sons. D'Annunzio wrote popular stories, light verse, and a society news column, all under pseudonyms, in order to support his family. In 1888, after determining that his journalistic writing was consuming too much time, d'Annunzio quit his job as a reporter so that he could finish his first novel, *The Child of Pleasure* (1888–1889).

During the 1880s in Rome, d'Annunzio perfected his metamorphosis into what some have called a fop, or dandy. Often writing under a pseudonym, a penchant he extended by immediately renaming women acquaintances, d'Annunzio sharpened his writing and shamelessly blended his flamboyant image and experiences into his sensual poetry and stories; the frank depiction of his seduction of his wife, Maria Hardouin, here named "Yella," in *Intermezzo de rime* (1883), brought accusations of pornography, but boosted sales.





Gabriele D'Annunzio D'Annunzio, Gabriele, photograph. The Library of Congress.

D'Annunzio's literary career flourished in overlapping phases, each dominated by a genre. Following sensual verse and naturalistic short stories, the second phase began with the publication of his novel, *Il piacere* (*The Child of Pleasure*), an examination of the sexual and sensual pleasures of the facile lover Count Andrea Sperelli, a fictionalized d'Annunzio. His other novels, including the psychological study *L'innocente* (1892; *The Intruder*), the basis for Luchino Visconti's film (1979), also incorporate autobiographical elements and descriptions of the crumbling urban world of the aristocrats and reflect d'Annunzio's growing interest in Nietzsche's concept of the superman.

**Public Affairs** Throughout the 1890s, d'Annunzio began writing for the theater. The leading roles typically featured Eleonora Duse, a noted actress of the day whose relationship with d'Annunzio was widely discussed. By 1891, his marriage with Maria Hardouin had ended. In 1904, *The Daughter of Jorio* garnered a great deal of attention for both d'Annunzio and Duse, and the drama was commonly imitated. Duse was also the inspiration for the character Foscarina in the novel *The Flame of Life* (1900). A fictionalized account of his liaison with Duse, this novel created a great furor when it was published. In 1910 he and Duse separated, and Duse would no longer perform in his plays. D'Annunzio continued to live extravagantly

even though he did not have much income. As a result of accumulating large debt, he fled to France in 1910, where he remained until the advent of World War I.

**War and Politics: Defying Orders** D'Annunzio was elected to the Italian parliament in 1897 and became a nationalist of high profile. When he returned to Italy at the outbreak of World War I, d'Annunzio reentered the political scene, delivering speeches and writing pamphlets. He joined the air force and became one of Italy's most popular heroes. During a forced landing, d'Annunzio was blinded in one eye by a fragment from the plane's propeller. While recovering from the injury, he composed *Notturmo* (1921), a collection of prose meditations. In 1919, believing that the Allies had shorted Italy in the postwar division of land, d'Annunzio defied Italian government orders and led several thousand volunteer troops to reclaim the town of Fiume (present day Rijeka, Croatia). He held his position and even declared war on Italy before being overthrown by Italian troops in 1921. After Fiume, d'Annunzio was allowed to retire to a villa on Lake Garda, where he spent his last years writing. In 1924, with Benito Mussolini's approval, d'Annunzio was named Prince of Montenevoso and, in 1937, he was made president of the Italian Royal Academy. On March 1, 1938, d'Annunzio died of a cerebral hemorrhage while writing at his desk.

### Works in Literary Context

D'Annunzio's tendency to adopt artistic trends resulted in his being influenced by a number of writers and movements throughout his career. *Primo Vere*, for instance, was inspired by *Odi Barbare* (1877; *Barbarian Odes*), a volume by Giosué Carducci, an Italian winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature. D'Annunzio's early short stories are regional tales influenced by French writer Guy de Maupassant, Italian writer Giovanni Verga, and the naturalist movement of the late nineteenth century. The stories are characterized by a conviction that the everyday life of the middle and lower classes deserve serious literary treatment. Because of his artistic fickleness, d'Annunzio's work often reflects contradictory movements and themes. For example, his novels were influenced by Decadence, which encouraged sensationalism and held that art was superior to nature, a movement contrary to naturalism. *The Child of Pleasure* is written in the style of such French novelists as Joris-Karl Huysmans, while *The Maidens of the Rock* (1898) carries echoes of French Symbolism.

**The Superman** Nietzsche's philosophy includes the concept of the superman, an individual who discovers that it is in his best interests to reject any outside ideas about ethics, trusting instead what he finds within himself. Ultimately, the superiority of the superman sets him apart from others, as he has created his own realm of good and evil. It follows, then, that the superman is contemptuous of the masses, as well as any democratic system of government. Intrigued by the model of

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

D'Annunzio's famous contemporaries include:

**Rabindranath Tagore** (1861–1941): Revered in India for his poetry and songs, Tagore helped introduce Indian art and philosophy to the Western world.

**Joseph Conrad** (1857–1924): Conrad's works, which include the story "Heart of Darkness," (1899) lead readers into morally dark worlds.

**Thomas Mann** (1875–1955): Some critics believe that the main character in Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (1947) represents the whole of German culture during Nazism.

**Ernest de Sélincourt** (1870–1943): A professor of poetry at Oxford, Sélincourt's work as an academic includes his well-respected editions of the letters and poetry of Dorothy and William Wordsworth.

**Vincent van Gogh** (1853–1890): While in a mental institution, van Gogh painted *Starry Night* (1889), one of his most famous works.

**William Taft** (1857–1930): As the twenty-sixth president of the United States, Taft supported strengthening America's position in the Caribbean and the Far East by expanding private American investments.

**Benito Mussolini** (1883–1945): Mussolini was the Fascist dictator of Italy from 1922 to 1943.

Nietzsche's superman, d'Annunzio personifies the motif in several characters who act outside the limits of decency and the law. Their amorality is supposedly justified by their superhuman capabilities. Throughout his novels and dramas, d'Annunzio perverts the superman persona by creating characters who perform atrocious acts of violence.

**Dramatizing the Superman** Almost all of d'Annunzio's plays elaborate on the superman rationale. While often dreadful, the plays are also interesting. Such works include d'Annunzio's third novel, *The Intruder* (1893), whose characters exemplify qualities of the superman taken to horrific extremes, *Glory* (1899), which depicts Ruggero Flammo, a Roman dictator who rules with cruelty until he is assassinated, and *More Than Love* (1906), which focuses on a heroic explorer who, in addition to seducing his best friend's sister, is revealed to be a fraud. *The Ship* (1908) is another drama that typifies an unethical superman. In this play, the character of Marco Gatico is presented as a hero who is not bound to the moral standards of lesser mortals. In all of d'Annunzio's Nietzsche-inspired dramas, neither the restraint nor the plight of the common man is of concern to the superman.

Discussing d'Annunzio's immense popularity, Giuseppe Prezzolini writes that many Italians suffered from

"d'Annunzianism," the "Italian disease" of imitating his extravagant lifestyle. They copied his neckwear and goatee, adopted his diction and scorn for creditors, walked dogs with languorous eyes, and associated with ladies with high sounding names. In addition to the influence he had on his contemporaries, d'Annunzio holds an important place in twentieth-century literature today and continues to be a topic of study for scholars in the field.

### Works in Critical Context

No critical consensus about d'Annunzio's writing exists. Though rejected for his moral depravity by some, others praise him for bringing an unknown vitality to Italian literature. In general, d'Annunzio is commended for his semiautobiographical novel, *The Child of Pleasure*, and his poetry is noted for its linguistic virtuosity. Unquestionably, though, the dramas are regarded to be d'Annunzio's most offensive and least successful works. Today, d'Annunzio's works, as a whole, are largely forgotten, and his plays are rarely performed. Instead, it is his life, especially his political affiliations, that has fascinated academics.

**Ties to Myth** From the onset, d'Annunzio's work shocked critics and audiences alike. While several scholars have praised their inventive use of classical mythology, other academics disagree. According to Benedetto Croce, a critic during d'Annunzio's time, "Ancient Greek tragedy and mediaeval mysteries are the means used in a vain attempt to excite violent and troublous moods." Instead of achieving literary magnificence, "feelings supposedly heroic are contaminated," continues Croce.

**The Child of Pleasure** The preface of d'Annunzio's first novel, *The Child of Pleasure*, is a letter addressed to his friend Francesco Paolo Michetti in which d'Annunzio says that his work is, in essence, a study of corruption, depravity, and of "many other subtleties and falsities and vain cruelties." From one perspective, the novel is an attempt to define what love is. The answer, of course, is disheartening, as love seems to be "nothing more than a masochistic or sadistic experience, a form of punishment inflicted upon another human being—an experience utterly devoid of any uplifting elements," claims Croce. Indeed, even the narrative of the novel assesses Andrea Sperelli, the main character, accordingly: "Each of these loves brought him to a new degradation; each inebriated him with evil rapture, without satisfying him; each taught him some special subtlety of vice yet unknown to him. He had in him the seeds of all infections. He corrupted and was corrupted."

**Cruel Dramas** D'Annunzio's dramatic works are most commonly criticized for lacking humanity and for their excessive depictions of such ferocities as sadism, murder, and mutilation. Frank Moore claims that *The Dead City*, one of d'Annunzio's earliest plays, offends "not our morals but our taste" with its eye-gouging, decapitation, and

incest. In such plays as *More Than Love* (1906) and *The Ship* (1908), affection and kindness are, according to Croce, “submerged by the sensuality which steadily prevails and dictates to the author, forcing him to delineate not persons but bodies, and not even idealized bodies but bodies heavily fleshy, radiating attraction for the senses but also that disgust and recoil which flesh does sometimes excite.” Surely much of the repulsiveness of d’Annunzio’s plays is a result of the characters’ desensitized view of the people and violence surrounding them.

## Responses to Literature

1. Decadence as a literary movement has multiple explanations and definitions. With the help of a dictionary of literature, compose a working definition of Decadence as it relates to the work of d’Annunzio. What sort of connotations has *decadence* come to have in contemporary society?
2. Early in his career, d’Annunzio was criticized for writing works that were imitative of other writers. Discuss why you think he felt the need to rely so heavily on other authors. What did his critics say about his imitative style? Do you agree or disagree with their assessments of his work?
3. Critic Benedetto Croce claims that d’Annunzio’s works “pass criticism on themselves” because of their wantonness, ferocity, and violence. What is d’Annunzio’s purpose for including violent or repulsive acts in his dramatic works? Compare these works to movies produced today, which often are filled with gratuitous violence and torture.
4. Read *The Child of Pleasure*, which treats love and pleasure as processes of corruption, and consider what statements the novel is making about the nature of corruption. What is corruption, for d’Annunzio? What is its source? Is this another way of trying to understand the source of “evil” in humanity? Why do you think d’Annunzio takes “love” as his vehicle for an exploration of evil and corruption?

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## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Viewed by some critics as representations of d’Annunzio himself, the protagonists of d’Annunzio’s novels and dramas frequently consider themselves beyond ordinary rules of society. In these works, d’Annunzio’s interest in Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of the superman is evident. Other works of art that demonstrate an interest in the disregard for the values of society include the following:

*The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987), a novel by Tom Wolfe.

Set in New York, this novel features a variety of amoral characters: corrupt politicians, dishonest lawyers, self-serving activists, and greedy stockbrokers.

*The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955), a novel by Patricia Highsmith. The manipulative, murderous actions of Tom Ripley defy all moral standards as he assumes the life of the wealthy Dickie Greenleaf.

*Poems for Men Who Dream of Lolita* (1992), a poetry collection by Kim Morrissey. Based on Vladimir Nabokov’s novel *Lolita* (1955), the poems in this volume are told in the voice of twelve-year-old Lolita, the girl who becomes the object of obsession for her stepfather.

*Carmen* (1875), an opera by Georges Bizet. For an audience accustomed to moral plots and sentimental happy endings, *Carmen* was considered scandalous with its amoral characters and tragic ending.

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## Dante Alighieri

BORN: 1265, Florence, Italy

DIED: 1321, Ravenna, Italy

NATIONALITY: Italian

GENRE: Poetry

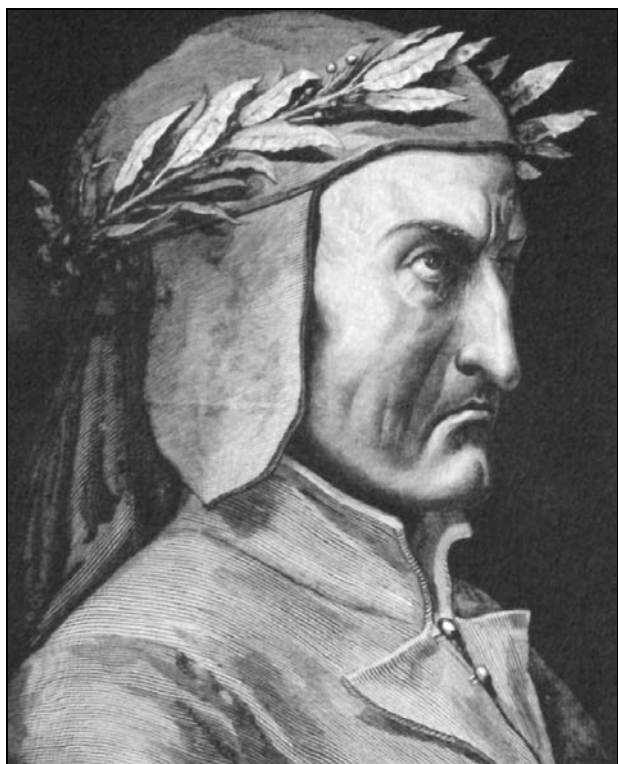
MAJOR WORKS:

*New Life* (c. 1293)

*The Divine Comedy* (1307–1321)

## Overview

Considered the finest poet that Italy has ever produced, Dante Alighieri is also celebrated as a major influence on western European culture. He wrote *The Divine Comedy* (*La Divina Commedia*, 1307–1321), the greatest poetic composition of the Christian Middle Ages and the first



Dante Dante, illustration by Gustav Dore

masterpiece of world literature in a modern European language. Called “the Supreme Poet” in Italy, he forms, along with Petrarch and Boccaccio, one of “the three fountains,” so called because from them all later literature seemed to flow. His championing of using Italian instead of Latin in his writings has also led to his being called “the father of the Italian language.”

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Dante lived in a restless age of political conflict between popes and emperors and of strife within the Italian city-states. In particular, Florence was torn apart by strife between two warring political factions: the Guelphs, who were loyal to the pope, and the Ghibelines, who were loyal to the Holy Roman Emperor. Even within these factions, however, there were factions, and Dante’s relationship with the various power brokers of Florence had a direct impact on his fortunes. Dante may be considered the greatest and last Italian medieval poet, although he paved the way for the great artistic and scientific flowering known as the Italian Renaissance, which would take root in Florence late in the fourteenth century.

**Early Life in Florence** Dante was born in Florence, the son of Bellincione d’Alighiero. His family descended, he tells us, from “the noble seed” of the Roman founders

of Florence. His great-grandfather Cacciaguida had been knighted by Holy Roman Emperor Conrad III and died about 1147 while fighting in the Second Crusade.

Although his family was reduced to modest circumstances, Dante was able to live as a gentleman and to pursue his studies. It is probable that he attended the Franciscan school of Santa Croce and the Dominican school of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, where he gained the knowledge of the doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas and of the mysticism that was to become the foundation of his philosophical culture. It is known from his own testimony that in order to perfect his literary style he also studied with Brunetto Latini, the Florentine poet and master of rhetoric. Perhaps encouraged by Brunetto in his pursuit of learning, Dante traveled to Bologna, where he probably attended the well-known schools of rhetoric.

Dante does not write of his family or marriage, but his father died before 1283, and soon afterward, in accordance with his father’s previous arrangements, he married Gemma di Manetto Donati. They had several children, of whom two sons, Jacopo and Pietro, and a daughter, Antonia, are known.

**Lyric Poetry** Dante began early in life to compose poetry, an art he taught himself as a young man. Through his love lyrics he became known to other Florentine poets, and most important to him was his friendship with Guido Cavalcanti, which resulted from an exchange of sonnets.

Both Dante and Guido were concerned with the effects of love on the mind, particularly from a philosophical point of view. Only Dante, however, began gradually to develop the idea that love could become the means of spiritual perfection. While Guido was more interested in natural philosophy, Dante assiduously cultivated his knowledge of the Latin poets, particularly Virgil, whom he later called his guide and authority in the art of poetry.

**The Love of Beatrice** During his youth Dante had known a young, noble Florentine woman whose grace and beauty so impressed him that he immortalized her in his poetry as the idealized “Beatrice,” the “bringer of blessings,” who seemed “a creature come from heaven to earth, a miracle manifest in reality.” Dante’s Beatrice is believed to have been Bice, the daughter of Folco Portinari, and later the wife of Simone dei Bardi. Dante had seen her for the first time when both were nine years old; he had named her in a ballad among the sixty fairest women of Florence. But it was only later that idealized “Beatrice” took on the role of Dante’s muse, or inspiration, and became the guide of his thoughts and emotions.

When the young Beatrice died on June 8, 1290, Dante was overcome with grief but found consolation in thoughts of her glory in heaven. He was prompted to gather from among all his poems those that had been written in her honor or had some bearing on his love for her. This plan resulted in the small volume of poetry and

prose, the *New Life* (*Vita nuova*, c. 1293), one of the first important examples of Italian literary prose.

**Political Intrigues** Dante's literary interests did not isolate him from the events of his times. On the contrary, he was involved in the political life of Florence. In 1289 he had fought with the Florentine cavalry at the battle of Campaldino. In 1295 he joined the guild of physicians and pharmacists (membership in a guild being a precondition for holding public office in Florence). A year later he participated in a citizens' government known as the Council of the Hundred; and in 1300 he was elected to one of six offices of prior, or president, of the Florentine guilds.

As a prominent politician, Dante aligned himself with the "White" Guelphs. The Guelphs were the Florentine political faction that supported the pope, but the White Guelphs disagreed with some of the pope's policies. The "Black" Guelphs remained uncritically supportive of the pope. In October 1301 Dante was sent in a delegation from Florence to Pope Boniface VIII, and during his absence the Blacks gained control of Florence. In the resulting banishment of the Whites, Dante was sentenced to exile. Despite various attempts to regain admission to Florence, he was never to enter his native city again.

**Exile** In exile, Dante traveled from city to city, biding his time and hoping outside forces would change the political climate in Florence so that he might return. His hopes were raised when Emperor Henry VII's forces descended into Italy in 1310 to restore justice and order among the cities and to reunite church and state. When Henry VII, whose efforts proved fruitless, died in Siena in 1313, Dante lost every hope of restoring himself to an honorable position in Florence. His Latin treatise *De monarchia*, is a statement of Dante's political theories and as a practical guide toward the restoration of peace in Europe under a temporal monarch in Rome. This work was probably written around the time of Henry VII's military efforts in Italy, and was written in anticipation of or in response to the campaign.

In 1315 Dante twice refused pardons offered him by the citizens of Florence under humiliating conditions. He and his children were consequently condemned to death as rebels. He spent his last years in Tuscany, in Verona, and finally in Ravenna. There, under the patronage of Guido da Polenta and joined by his children and possibly also by his wife, Dante was greatly esteemed and spent a happy and peaceful period at work on his masterpiece, *The Divine Comedy*. This brought together all of the literary and philosophical influences of Dante's life. Dante's goal in the work, he revealed, was "to remove those living in this life from the state of misery and lead them to the state of felicity." He achieved his goal: the work was an immediate sensation, and its perceived value and importance has grown with each passing generation. Dante died on September 13 or 14, 1321, still in exile,

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Dante's famous contemporaries include:

**Petrarch** (1304–1374): Often called the father of Italian humanism, Francesco Petrarca (or Petrarch, as he is known in English) was the first to seriously advocate the use of Italian in works of literature and was largely responsible for popularizing the sonnet.

**Giotto di Bondone** (1267–1337): A painter and architect from Florence, Giotto is usually credited with being the first artist to break away from the artistic traditions of the Middle Ages, thus setting in motion that which would eventually mature into the artistic Italian Renaissance.

**Pope Boniface VIII** (1235–1303): Patron of Giotto, Boniface is mentioned in both *The Decameron* and *La Divina Commedia*; in neither case in a flattering light due to his political activities. Dante goes so far as to imagine meeting Boniface in Hell, condemned for practicing simony, or the selling of holy offices.

but in 1373, more than half a century after Dante's death in exile, the city of Florence honored its native poet by appointing Giovanni Boccaccio, the eminent writer and scholar, to deliver a series of public lectures on *The Divine Comedy*.

### Works in Literary Context

Dante's work can be seen as the climax of the late medieval period in Europe. Dante's masterpiece was also an historic triumph for the Italian language, which, owing to the undisputed primacy of Latin as the idiom of medieval science and literature, was considered vulgar. Despite Dante's universality and cosmic view of life, there is something quintessentially Italian about *The Divine Comedy*. Probing the expressive resources and expanding the horizons of the Italian language, the poet created what is widely considered the foundation of Italian literature and a point of reference for scores of later writers, including Geoffrey Chaucer, Lord Tennyson, T.S. Eliot, and Jorge Luis Borges.

**The Spiritual Journey** The literal narrative of the work involves Dante's journey through Hell and Purgatory on his way to Paradise. Thus, *The Divine Comedy* is part of a long tradition of stories about journeys through temptations and "evil" toward ultimate redemption. The ancient Greek epic the *Odyssey* by Homer and Virgil's epic *The Aeneid* (directly influenced by Homer's work) are both pre-Christian tales of spiritual journeys. Christian writers have used the idea of the spiritual journey to describe the path of mankind in a state of sin moving away from



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

*The Decameron* (c. 1353), a collection of stories by Giovanni Boccaccio. A medieval allegory of one hundred short tales told as the Black Death ravages the countryside, the bawdy tales of love's rising and falling fortunes satirizes Dante's literary style.

*Canterbury Tales* (c. 1380s), a collection of stories by Geoffrey Chaucer. Chaucer is often compared to Dante, for he too chose to write in the vernacular, in his case English. Borrowing the frame structure of *The Decameron*, Chaucer's unfinished masterpiece presents a series of tales told along a pilgrimage route to Canterbury Cathedral.

*The Song of Hiawatha* (1855), a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. This epic poem is written in the form of an ancient Finnish saga.

temptation and toward salvation. St. Augustine's *Confessions* is an example of a personal narrative about a spiritual journey to salvation. Numerous works of fiction follow the pattern of the spiritual journey, too, including Joseph Conrad's 1899 novel *Heart of Darkness*, Somerset Maugham's 1944 novel *The Razor's Edge*, and Nobel laureate Gao Xingjian's 2000 novel *Soul Mountain*.

**Allegory** Dante constructs an allegory of a double journey: his experience in the supernatural world points to the journey of all humankind through earthly life. An allegory is a mode of literature in which the elements of a story are meant to be read figuratively, as symbols. In *The Divine Comedy*, for example, the poet finds himself in a dark wood (a symbol of sin); he tries to escape by climbing a mountain illuminated by the sun (symbolizing God). Impeded by the sudden appearance of three beasts, which symbolize the major divisions of sin in the *Inferno*, he is about to be driven back when Virgil (representing human reason) appears, sent to Dante's aid by Beatrice. Virgil becomes Dante's guide through Hell, in a descent which is the first stage in his ascent to God in humility.

The most famous examples of ancient, pre-Christian allegories include Plato's famous "Allegory of the Cave" and Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* (c. 524 C.E.), which Dante studied. Another Christian writer famous for his use of allegory was John Bunyan, author of *A Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), which was distinctly Protestant in its outlook and was read widely by the Puritan settlers of North America. American author Nathaniel Hawthorne also made frequent use of allegory, especially in short stories such as "Young Goodman Brown." More recent examples of allegorical fiction include William

Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* (1954) and J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980).

## Works in Critical Context

Dante is known primarily for his masterwork *The Divine Comedy*, which has earned almost universal acclaim since its publication.

***The Divine Comedy*** Victor Hugo summed up the nineteenth-century romantic view of *The Divine Comedy* thus: "Dante has constructed within his own mind the bottomless pit. He has made the epic of the spectres. He rends the earth; in the terrible hole he has made, he puts Satan. Then he pushes the world through Purgatory up to Heaven. Where all else ends, Dante begins. Dante is beyond man." The general enthusiasm of the Romantic era for *The Divine Comedy*—also evidenced by tributes from such philosophers as Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling and Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel—secured Dante's preeminent position in world literature. Throughout the nineteenth century, *The Divine Comedy*—especially the *Inferno*—became the subject of extensive and detailed literary, historical, philological, theological, and philosophical analysis.

The eminent twentieth-century poet and essayist Jorge Luis Borges has recognized the relevance of *The Divine Comedy* for modern readers, asserting that it "is a book that everyone ought to read. Not to do so is to deprive oneself of the greatest gift that literature can give us; to submit to a strange asceticism."

***Dante's Other Works*** The monumental success of *The Divine Comedy* has all but overshadowed Dante's other works, which were also highly influential in his day. These include a collection of early canzoni published in *New Life*. Critics have praised these lyrics for their *stil nuovo*, or "new style," a refreshing and innovative approach to love poetry that equates the love experience with a mystical spiritual revelation.

## Responses to Literature

1. In addition to his epic poetry, Dante wrote many sonnets as well. The Italian sonnet is one of the most popular and enduring forms of poetry. Research the properties of the Italian sonnet and write one of your own. The traditional subject is about love, but you can write about anything that interests you!
2. In *The Divine Comedy* Dante is led by the ancient Roman poet Virgil. What were some of the circumstances in Dante's life and the times he lived in that led him to use a pagan instead of a Christian guide in his narrative?
3. What were Dante's views of religion when he wrote *The Divine Comedy*? How did he feel about the papacy? Why did he meet some popes in Hell? What was the state of the Church during Dante's lifetime?

4. Dante's view of the afterlife is certainly one of the more gripping and imaginative interpretations. Research other views of the afterlife held by other Christian writers over the centuries. How are their views different? How are they the same?

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## Bei Dao

BORN: 1949, Beijing, China

NATIONALITY: Chinese

GENRE: Poetry, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Waves* (1985)

*The August Sleepwalker* (1990)

*Old Snow* (1991)

*Forms of Distance* (1994)

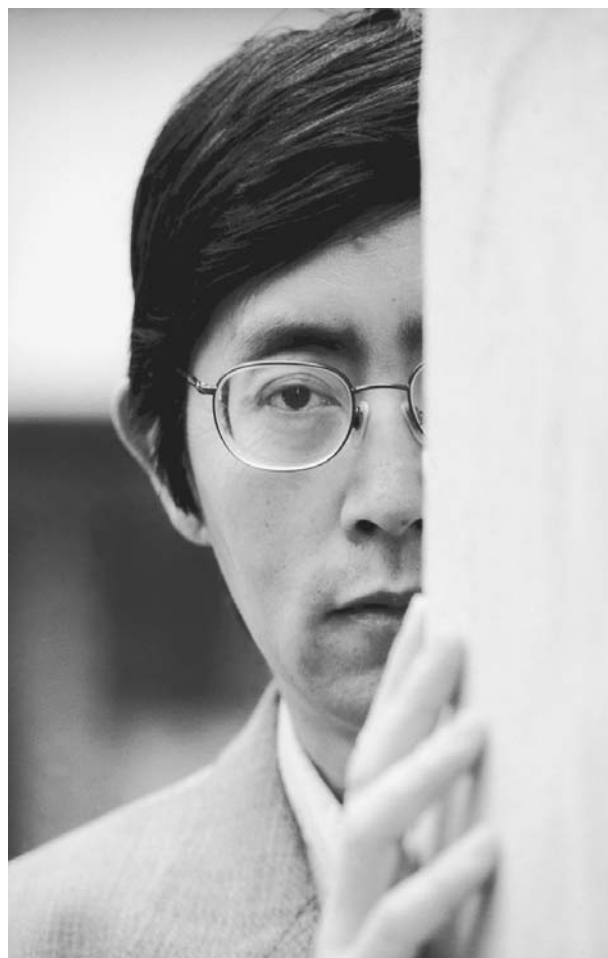
*Landscape over Zero* (1996)

### Overview

Bei Dao is a Chinese poet whose groundbreaking works critiqued the Chinese Cultural Revolution and influenced the development of the pro-democracy movement in the 1970s and 1980s.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**The Cultural Revolution** Bei Dao was born as Zhao Zhenkai on August 2, 1949, in Beijing, China. It was the same year that the Chinese Communists came to power. During his teen years, Bei Dao belonged to the Red Guards, a group that supported the Communist leader Mao Zedong. During this period, China underwent what Mao called a “cultural revolution,” the purpose of which was to erase, often through violent means, all traces of European influence and all traces of upper-class, middle-class, and intellectual Chinese culture of a traditional nature, unless it was deemed by the authorities



Bei Dao © Rossano B. Maniscalchi / Alinari / The Image Works

to serve the new Communist state in a practical and unmistakable way. Bei Dao developed misgivings about the Cultural Revolution and was “reeducated” as a construction worker. He later founded and edited the underground literary magazine *Jintian* (Today).

**Life after Mao** When the Cultural Revolution came to an end with the death of Mao in 1976, China began to rebuild its culture and educational system. Bei Dao wrote the first and most celebrated novella to appear after Mao's death, *Waves*. The stories in the book deal with the years of social and political strife caused by the Cultural Revolution. *Waves* was published briefly after Mao's death, and the government permitted such unauthorized publications to be distributed. When some of Bei Dao's work was circulated during the pro-democracy student movement that erupted in the 1989 demonstration at Tiananmen Square, the government banned the novella, accusing Bei Dao of inciting the demonstration.

Bei Dao was at a writer's conference in Berlin during the Tiananmen massacre and was not allowed to return to

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Bei's famous contemporaries include:

- Andrzej Sapkowski** (1948–): Polish fantasy writer best known for *The Witcher* saga.
- William Gibson** (1948–): American Canadian writer who pioneered cyberpunk science fiction.
- Haruki Murakami** (1949–): Japanese writer whose novels are both humorous and surreal.
- Martin Amis** (1949–): English author who caricatures the absurdity of the postmodern condition.
- John Sayles** (1950–): American director and screenwriter whose independent films are noted for their reality and social commentary.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Bei's most influential work revealed the ruthlessness of Communist dictatorship. Here are some other works of fiction that make similar revelations:

- Animal Farm* (1945), a novella by George Orwell. This novella is an allegory that satirizes Soviet totalitarianism.
- One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962), a novel by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. This novel, set in a Soviet labor camp during the 1950s, demonstrates the brutality of Stalinist repression.
- Wild Swans* (1991), a novel by Jung Chang. This novel tells the story of three generations of Chinese women who survive the political turmoil of twentieth-century China.

China. He remained in exile and took teaching positions in Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and the United States. Currently, he lives in California and continues to write poetry, though his work is not available in China.

### Works in Literary Context

Bei Dao is the most prominent member of the Misty Poets, a group of Chinese poets who reacted against the restrictions of the Cultural Revolution and inspired pro-democracy movements, particularly among students, during the 1970s and 1980s. Bei Dao was described in the *New York Times Book Review* as “the guiding voice for young Chinese” during China’s Democracy Movement.

**The Impact of *Waves*** Much of Bei's impact came from the circulation of his revelatory novella, *Waves*. *Waves* was a sensation in a China that had been required to revere and obey Mao Zedong for the previous thirty years. The novel was the first work of literature that had been allowed to appear since Mao assumed control of China that openly criticized Maoist socialist principles. Thus, it was the only such work that the vast majority of Chinese readers had ever seen. Its readers saw for the first time a fierce condemnation of a Cultural Revolution whose effects had set the Chinese people adrift in a sea without faith or tradition.

The effect of *Waves* was to open up to its readers worlds with which they had no experience. Unfortunately, its effect was too great, and when Deng Xiaoping came to power, the book, which had been under continual attack by old party-liners, was suppressed. It is widely acknowledged, both inside and outside of China, that *Waves* paved the way for the student movement that erupted in Tiananmen Square in 1989.

### Works in Critical Context

Bei Dao first came to prominence in China with his novella *Waves*. One critic praised *Waves* by commenting that “at their best, [Dao's] stories are almost unbearably poignant. . . . [He] has found a way to speak to all of us.”

Bei Dao's poetry collections *Old Snow* and *The August Sleepwalker* have also met with critical praise. Carol Muske acknowledged the author's “ability to personify and objectify simultaneously the images of historical terror.” She has also described Bei Dao's verse as “mysterious poetry, abstract yet hauntingly personal.” *New Republic* contributor Stephen Owen wrote, “When Bei Dao's poetry succeeds—and sometimes it succeeds wonderfully—it does so not by words, which are always trapped within the nationality of language and its borders, but by the envisagements of images possible only with words.”

Bei Dao has won numerous literary awards and has been nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature several times.

### Responses to Literature

1. Bei Dao's most influential work, *Waves*, was at first allowed in China and then banned. Do you think that the impact of this work would have been greater or less had it never been banned? Explain your response in a short essay.
2. What kinds of images does Bei Dao use to evoke terror? Do these images adequately capture the experiences he is trying to convey? Discuss how poetry can effectively transmit a message to its readers.
3. Choose a major event in history and write a poem or short story that focuses on one person's experience of this event.



4. As a teen, Bei Dao first supported and then opposed Mao's Cultural Revolution. Based on research about the Cultural Revolution, write an essay explaining why Bei Dao probably had this change of heart.

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## Rubén Darío

BORN: 1867, Metapa (now Ciudad Darío), Nicaragua

DIED: 1916, Leon, Nicaragua

NATIONALITY: Nicaraguan

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Blue* (1888)

*Profane Hymns and Other Poems* (1896)

*Songs of Life and Hope* (1905)

*The Autumn Poem and Other Poems* (1910)

### Overview

One of the great names of Hispanic poetry, Rubén Darío is widely recognized as the embodiment of modernism in Spanish letters. He is best remembered for his innovative poetry, which blended experimental rhymes and meters with elements of classical literature and mythology. He spent most of his life outside his home country, working as a journalist and diplomat. A sense of tragic despair can be found in Darío's poetry and in his life, which he devoted to poetry in a way that called for almost religious sacrifice.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**The Child Poet** Rubén Darío was born Felix Rubén García Sarmiento on January 18, 1867, in Metapa (later renamed Ciudad Darío in his honor), Nicaragua. His parents separated when he was two, and he was mostly raised by aunts and uncles because of his mother's poverty. He displayed a precocious talent for poetry, and one aunt in particular nurtured his literary aspirations. He was a writer by age fourteen; by seventeen, he was working as



Rubén Darío Hulton Archive / Getty Images

a clerk in the office of the Nicaraguan president, writing for the capital of Managua's press, and giving public poetry readings. When his first book, *Epistles and Poems: First Notes* (1885), was completed, he published it under the pseudonym Rubén Darío.

Darío's early interest in journalism led to his association with members of the intelligentsia. In 1886, he became manager of a Nicaraguan daily newspaper, then embarked for Chile, where he contributed reviews and creative pieces to the daily *La Epoca* (The Epoch). In 1887, he won a prize in a poetry contest in Valparaíso for his "Epic Song to the Glories of Chile," a patriotic ode honoring Chile's military victory over Peru in 1879. This victory presaged Chile's 1881 occupation of Lima, the turning point in the War of the Pacific and an event that secured Chile's dominant position in Latin America for years to come.

Darío's first critically acclaimed work, *Blue* (1888), was released when he was twenty-one. This volume of prose and verse brought about a revolution in Spanish letters: a bold experimentation with line and meter construction, and a deliberate break with the conventions of Romanticism. Sonnets in unusual meters, the use of alliteration, and a rich association of metaphors, conceits, and wordplay reflect a mastery of the musicality of the poem. *Blue* marked, as Octavio Paz has written, "the official birth of modernism."

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Darío's famous contemporaries include:

**Antonio Machado** (1875–1939): Spanish poet, leader of a literary movement called the Generation of '98.

**Juan Ramon Jimenez** (1881–1958): Spanish poet who helped Darío publish work in Europe; Jimenez won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1956.

**William Butler Yeats** (1865–1939): Irish poet whose works were fundamental to the Irish literary revival; Yeats won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923.

**Paul Claudel** (1868–1955): French poet and diplomat known for his passionately Catholic writings.

**W. E. B. Du Bois** (1868–1963): African American intellectual and activist, author of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and cofounder of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People).

**Antonio Gaudi** (1852–1926): Spanish architect influenced by modernism.

**Theodore Roosevelt** (1858–1919): American politician, hero of the Spanish-American War, and president of the United States from 1901–1909.

***A Bohemian Vagabond and a Diplomat, Too*** In 1889, Darío left Valparaíso for Central America. Over the next two years, his journalism work took him from Nicaragua to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Costa Rica. On diplomatic assignments, he sailed to Europe in 1892 and again in 1893. By this time, the vagabond poet, roving correspondent, and diplomat had become a symbol of a new bohemianism in Latin America. The fall of 1893 found him in Buenos Aires, serving as Colombian consul general to Argentina, writing for the daily *La Nación*, and partaking of the cosmopolitan capital's nightlife.

One of Darío's key poetic works, *Profane Hymns and Other Poems*, appeared in Buenos Aires in 1896. An expanded edition was published in Paris five years later. This collection, which includes some of Darío's most celebrated verses, would confirm his leadership of the Modernismo movement in both Spain and the Americas, and his revival of the stagnant poetic tradition in the Spanish language. Thematically, *Profane Hymns* is a multifaceted work that includes poems about creative freedom, love and eroticism, Christianity and paganism, and the poet's critical attitude toward materialism and modernity. Stylistically, the book takes liberties with stanza forms and employs free verse, a form that later became prevalent in Hispanic poetry.

***Falling Apart and Falling Together*** While Darío was traveling and writing, his life was falling to pieces. His

first wife died in 1893, after two years of marriage. And very soon after, he was tricked into marrying his first girlfriend, the unfaithful Rosario Murillo. The marriage quickly deteriorated, but they were never divorced. Rosario continued to pursue him, however, and to extract a portion of his income, for many years. In 1899, covering the aftermath of the six-month Spanish-American War of 1898 for the Argentine newspaper *La Nación*, he fell in love with a young woman from the Spanish countryside, Francisca Sanchez. The couple had several children, two of whom died in infancy. Darío took to drink, a habit that gradually reduced his faculties and would ultimately lead to his untimely death. These circumstances of his life underlie the poetics of despair in Darío's verse.

Darío collected his reports from Spain at the cusp of the twentieth century into the book *Contemporary Spain* (1901). As Nicaraguan consul to France, he resided in Paris from 1903 to 1907. During this period, he wrote perhaps his most important book of poetry, *Songs of Life and Hope* (1905). In this work, Darío has reached his artistic maturity: No longer ensconced in an idealistic ivory tower, he expresses concern for political unity and explores the tenets of a practical humanism. Poems such as "To Roosevelt" convey the theme of Hispanic cultural solidarity, while other verses insist on the possibility and importance of a future for humanity. Amid the life-affirming verses, however, there is also an undercurrent of disenchantment and despair, movingly expressed in the concluding poem, "What Gets You."

***Final Years*** In the final decade of Darío's life, he continued to travel across the Atlantic between Europe and South America, despite economic hardship, and continued to compose verse. As a dedicated spokesman for Hispanic concerns, he urged Spain and Spanish America to unite against the imperialism of the United States. U.S. imperialism was driven, as Darío saw it, by the arrogance of such leaders as Theodore Roosevelt, who far exceeded his mandate during the Spanish-American War, ordering the invasion of the Philippines. He had praise for some aspects of U.S. culture, however, as he reveals in "Salute to the Eagle," published in *The Wandering Song* (1907).

The outstanding achievement of Darío's final years, however, is the "Autumn Poem," included in *The Autumn Poem and Other Poems* (1910). The poem is an exhortation to live, an invitation to the sensual world, and an embrace of death as the pinnacle of life. Here, if nowhere else, Darío has reconciled his persistent melancholia with his own desire for hope and life.

Following the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Darío left Europe for the last time, bound for New York. While there, he fell ill with pneumonia. His book *Song to Argentina and Other Poems* was published in 1914. A year later, his health declined; he returned to Nicaragua with Rosario Murillo, and died of cirrhosis of the liver in February of 1916.

## Works in Literary Context

As a result of Rubén Darío's education and early interest in poetry, he became familiar with the Western literary canon. French poets such as Charles Baudelaire and Paul Verlaine were an important influence on Darío's work; the Parnassian movement represented by Verlaine and Stephen Mallarmé, for example, with its emphasis on art for art's sake, is a direct precursor to Darío's aesthetic. The Cuban poet-revolutionary José Martí, another father of Modernismo, is a significant precursor to Darío. In his youth, Darío also wrote some verses in the style of the Spanish Romantic poet Gustavo Becquer.

**Modernismo** Darío became the leader of a new Hispanic literary movement called Modernismo, which should not be confused with Anglo-American modernism. This movement responded to a perception that Spanish letters had reached a low point; the new cultural and artistic attitude dominated the arts in Spain and Spanish America as the twentieth century opened. Modernismo adapts and blends the Romantic, Parnassian, and Symbolist movements current in Europe at the time. Its distinct quality is the expression of inner passions in a rhythmically stylized verbal music. Darío revived Spanish poetics with his vibrant language and novel technique, but his contribution goes beyond the formal. He demonstrated that poetry could be more than an aesthetic pleasure, but a vehicle for understanding all of human existence, an adventure in spiritual, social, erotic, and metaphysical experience.

**Spiritual Syncretism** One important theme in Darío's poetry, notably in *Songs of Life and Hope*, is the relationship between Christianity and paganism. Darío at times believed in God, and at other times did not. Essentially Catholic, he did not reject a deep religious syncretism—or merging of different belief systems—that could allow him to search for an understanding of what he experienced as the mysterious human presence in the universe. He sometimes tried to escape the existential despair that also dogged his footsteps through esoteric doctrines and the occult. And he found some comfort in a belief in the union of all nature, seeing all things as penetrated by a universal soul, in keeping with Eastern mysticism.

**Spiritual Sensuality** These spiritual concerns also relate to the pervasive eroticism in Darío's poetry, for the erotic is often presented in a transcendent or mythological light, as in "In Spring" and "Venus" from *Blue*. One of Darío's most celebrated poems is "Flesh, Celestial Flesh of the Woman..." Darío described this poem in *The Story of My Books* (1912) as "a hymn to the mysterious feminine enchantment." The poem likens female flesh to "divine bread / For which our blood is our wine!" Such references unite elements of pagan and Christian traditions. Darío considered women's bodies as a source of the absolute, with the power, like the food of the gods, to bestow immortality. The profane and the sacred, from this perspective, are indistinguishable.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Rubén Darío's writing conveys a "poetics of despair," a distilled and crafted essence of pain. Poetry is often the preferred medium for cries of anguish, as in the following well-known works.

"Dover Beach" (1867), a poem by Matthew Arnold. This poetic lament for the human condition—"And we are here as on a darkling plain"—is one of the most famous poems of the nineteenth century.

"The Waste Land" (1922), a poem by T. S. Eliot. This long, dissonant cry of universal despair is now regarded as a classic of modernist literature.

"It Was Not Death, for I Stood Up" (1924), a poem by Emily Dickinson. This brief poem describes a devastation so complete that it cannot even "justify despair."

*Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* (1924), a poetry collection by Pablo Neruda. The most famous book of verse by one of the most distinguished twentieth-century poets.

"Howl" (1956), a poem by Allen Ginsberg. The signature poem of the Beat Generation, a furious and freewheeling lament for the stagnant state of American culture.

**Poetics of Despair** Darío's body of work can be studied in terms of a modern, existential, tragic despair; it is one of the terms that best define Darío and other tormented authors of Modernismo. While the Romantics rhapsodized about boredom and ennui, Darío developed the more modern concept of anguish, which opened the path to twentieth-century literature in Spanish. Darío's biography surely reveals causes for his profound despair: the death of his young wife, his subsequent forced matrimony to Rosario Murillo, and her relentless pursuit of him; the deaths of two of his children; his economic woes; the loss of his Christian faith; and the debilitating effects of alcohol. He felt homeless and rejected from his own society, and even out of sorts with the era in which he lived. He perceived how art and poetry were devalued in the crassly materialistic process of modernization. All these sources of personal anguish are transformed into a finely wrought aesthetic form in his poems.

**The Founder** In the prologue to *Profane Hymns*, Darío asserts his unwillingness to serve anyone as a model, much less to imitate anyone else—all in the name of total freedom, of the artist's need to create. Nevertheless, a century of Spanish poetry has followed in his wake. Most critics credit Darío with initiating a movement with enormous influence on literary works written in the Spanish language. Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz, for instance, referred to him as "the founder" of contemporary Spanish poetry.

## Works in Critical Context

Darío achieved critical success very early in his career. The second edition of *Blue*, published in Europe in 1890, provided him with transatlantic recognition, mainly thanks to praise from Spanish novelist Juan Valera. No provincial writer had ever made such an impact on the European literary scene. Some early critics failed to find transcendent meaning behind his exotic imagery and stylistic virtuosity, but by the time of Darío's death, he was eulogized worldwide as the fundamental Hispanic poet. Roberto González Echevarría writes, "In Spanish, there is poetry before and after Rubén Darío. The Nicaraguan was the first major poet in the language since the seventeenth century."

**Off the English-Speaking Radar** Although the volume of writings devoted to Darío is one of the most impressive in the history of Spanish and Spanish American literature, Darío remains largely unknown among English-speaking readers. The unique rhythms and linguistic nuances of his writings make them difficult to translate. In 1974, Keith Ellis published a groundbreaking study that presents the range of methods and perspectives employed by critics to study Darío's life and works. The need for further editorial interest in Darío's works is evidenced by the fact that there is no available critical edition of his complete poetry. To date, the only book of his poems to be translated in its entirety is *Songs of Life and Hope*.

**Songs of Life and Hope** Recent critical interest among English-speaking readers spurred Duke University Press's 2005 bilingual edition of *Songs of Life and Hope*, to which the response has been positive. Janet St. John observes, "Translators [Will] Derusha and [Alberto] Acerceda have clearly worked hard to present the real Darío, an innovative writer worthy of further examination," noting also that "Darío's work is multifaceted and thought provoking."

## Responses to Literature

1. In what ways does Hispanic literary movement known as Modernismo differ from the Anglo-American version of modernism?
2. What attitudes does Darío express toward modernity, progress, or the future in his work?
3. Syncretism is the merging of different beliefs or principles into a single worldview. Identify and discuss religious imagery and religious syncretism in Darío's poetry.
4. Contrast "To Roosevelt" with "Salute to the Eagle." What is Darío's attitude toward the United States?
5. What is the significance of Darío's technical and stylistic innovations in poetry?

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## Robertson Davies

BORN: 1913, Thamesville, Ontario, Canada

DIED: 1995, Orangeville, Ontario, Canada

NATIONALITY: Canadian

GENRE: Letters, journalism, plays, criticism, novels

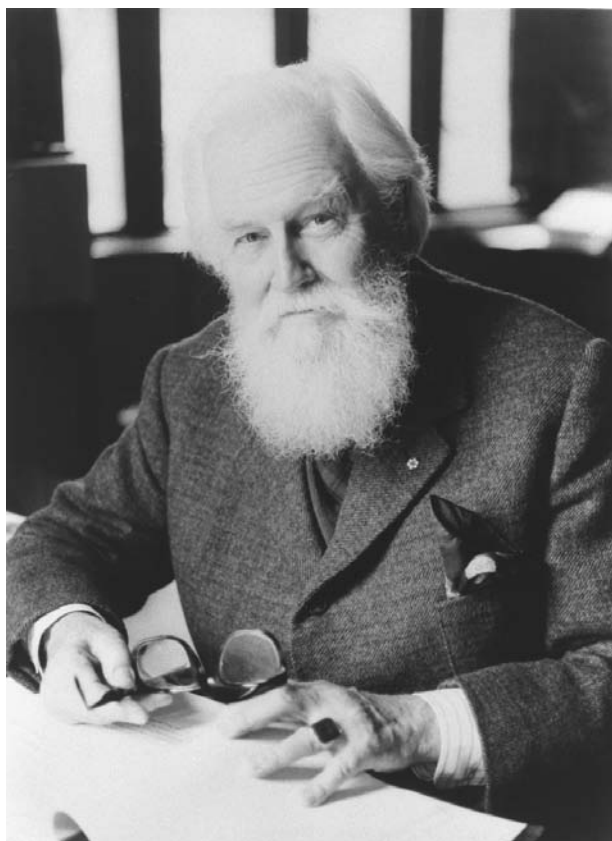
MAJOR WORKS:

*The Diary of Sam Marchbanks* (1947)

*The Fifth Business* (1970)

*The Manticore* (1972)

*World of Wonders* (1975)



Robertson Davies Davies, Robertson, photograph. © Jerry Bauer.  
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## Overview

Robertson Davies (also known as Samuel Marchbanks and William Robertson Davies) is admired for writing novels that skillfully combine accessibility and literary merit with an intriguing dash of the obscure, including such subjects as alchemy, saints' legends, Gypsy wisdom, tarot cards, shamanistic rituals, Anglo-Catholicism, and Jungian psychology. Most of his work explored the dangers of personal and cultural repression, and his sprawling, intellectually rich novels also exhibit a developing interest in Canadian identity. Davies was a writer of grand ideas and fertile imagination who excelled in a variety of literary disciplines. As a journalist, his humorous observations about life amused newspaper readers over two decades. His comic plays addressed the plight of the Canadian artist to great effect. With his bushy white beard and flowing mane of hair, Davies looked the part of a grizzled, ancient storyteller—which to his millions of devoted readers is exactly what he was.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Early Career in Drama** Davies developed an interest in drama early in life. At the age of three, he made his

stage debut in the opera *Queen Esther*. He maintained a diary throughout his school years in which he preserved his reactions to the stage performances he saw. Davies completed his higher education in 1938 at Balliol College, Oxford, where he earned a literature degree. His thesis, entitled *Shakespeare's Boy Actors*, attracted the attention of Sir Tyrone Guthrie, a legendary drama teacher, and Guthrie hired Davies to work with him at London's famous Old Vic theater.

Davies spent a year there working at a variety of jobs, from bit player to stage manager. He gained valuable stage experience in productions of Shakespeare, working alongside world-renowned actors including Ralph Richardson and Vivien Leigh. He also fell in love with the Old Vic's stage manager, Australian-born Brenda Mathews, whom he married on February 2, 1940. The couple moved to Canada, where Davies took a job as literary editor of the Toronto magazine *Saturday Night*.

**Davies, the Columnist** After two years with *Saturday Night*, Davies took a position with the *Peterborough Examiner*. He remained with that paper for the next twenty years. In the early days there, he wrote a whimsical column under the pseudonym "Samuel Marchbanks." These witty observations were later collected into the books *The Diary of Samuel Marchbanks*, *The Table Talk of Samuel Marchbanks*, and *Marchbanks' Almanack*. Another of his regular columns, "A Writer's Diary," which consisted of observations about the literary scene, helped establish Davies as a major new voice in criticism.

The 1940s were a fertile period for Davies. Besides his weekly columns, he was also writing and directing plays at the Peterborough Little Theatre. In 1946, his one-act comedy *Overlaid* was awarded a prize by the Ottawa Drama League. The fantasy *Eros at Breakfast* won the Gratien Gelinaz Prize for best Canadian play at the Dominion Drama Festival. The year 1948 saw the production of Davies's first full-length play. *Fortune, My Foe* deals with the plight of the Canadian artist and was awarded the Gratien Gelinaz Prize at the 1949 Dominion Drama Festival. Another three-act play, *At My Heart's Core*, deals with similar themes. Set in provincial Canada in 1837, this work shows Davies's growing mastery of historical material.

**Davies Turns to Novels** Frustrated by his inability to get his plays produced outside of Canada, Davies turned to novel writing in the 1950s. His first novel, *Tempest-Tost*, was published in 1951. Set in the small Canadian town of Salterton, the book details the reactions of townsfolk to a troupe of Shakespearean actors in their midst. *Leaven of Malice* is set in the same locale and revolves around the confusion that ensues when an erroneous engagement announcement is printed in a local newspaper. The final book in the Salterton trilogy, *A Mixture of Frailties*, concerns a young girl who returns to the town after a sojourn studying music in Europe.



## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Davies's famous contemporaries include:

**Thomas Pynchon** (1937–): American writer Pynchon's fiction and nonfiction writings encompass a vast array of subject matter, styles and themes, including the fields of history, science, and mathematics.

**Cormac McCarthy** (1933–): This American novelist has been widely credited with reviving and reinventing the genre of the Western novel.

**J. D. Salinger** (1919–): This American novelist achieved great critical success when he published *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951).

**Winston Churchill** (1874–1965): British prime minister whose career was defined by his firm leadership during World War II.

**Henri Matisse** (1869–1954): This French artist was a major figure in the "Fauvist" movement in art, which was marked by the use of bright, undiluted colors.

The books received many positive critical notices and established Davies's reputation as a novelist.

**The Deptford Trilogy** In 1970, Davies published a new novel, *Fifth Business*, the first installment of his Deptford Trilogy. The book chronicles sixty years in the life of Dunstan Ramsey, an assistant headmaster at a Canadian prep school. Davies weaves into the story many religious and psychological themes, prompting L. J. Davis of *Book World* to brand the novel "a work of theological fiction that approaches Graham Greene at the top of his form." Its rich plot helped make it a best seller in America, cementing Davies stature as an international author of the first rank.

Davies followed *Fifth Business* with another Deptford novel, *The Manticore*. Again set among the Canadian upper classes, the book follows David Staunton, an alcoholic attorney, on a spiritual odyssey of self-discovery. Another highbrow hit with readers, *The Manticore* received the Canadian Governor General's Award for excellence.

Rounding out The Deptford Trilogy was *World of Wonders*. Telling the story of Paul Dempster, a character who appears in the previous two novels, the book was judged "a novel of stunning verbal energy and intelligence" by Michael Mewshaw of the *New York Times Book Review*. Readers and reviewers alike generally found it a satisfying conclusion to the trilogy, only one of the many works that have led critics in both his homeland and abroad to describe Davies as a national treasure, securing his place in the Canadian literary canon.

## Works in Literary Context

Many of Davies's novels are marked by the psychological transformations of the main characters. As such, his novels may be considered reminiscent of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, in which the protagonist transforms into a giant cockroach, illustrating his growing awareness of how unhappy he is with his life. The specific nature of Davies's approach to his characters, however, is highly influenced by Jungian psychology.

**Jungian Psychology** The recurring theme of self-discovery in Davies's work follows the pattern established by psychologist Carl Jung, although Davies does not adhere strictly to Jungian psychology. While Roger Sale suggested in the *New York Review of Books* that, in common with the Jungian belief in archetypal influence on the human mind, Davies's fictional characters "discover the meaning of their lives, by discovering the ways those lives conform to ancient patterns," Davies explores a number of models for complete human identity. Patricia Monk claimed in her *The Smaller Infinity: The Jungian Self in the Novels of Robertson Davies* that though he had a "deep and long-lasting affinity with Jung ... Davies eventually moves beyond his affinity ... to a more impartial assessment of Jungianism as simply one way of looking at the universe, one myth among a number of others." Peter Baltensperger, writing in *Canadian Literature*, saw "the conquest of one's Self in the inner struggle and the knowledge of oneself as fully human" as a consistent theme throughout Davies's fiction.

**Novel Melodrama** Because he wrote a number of plays, had been a teacher and actor with the Old Vic Company, and had served on the board of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival for many years, it is no surprise to find that Davies employed many theatrical elements in his novels. Theatricality is one technique Davies uses to move his story along at a quicker pace. About *World of Wonders*, a *Time* magazine critic stated that the characters "are brilliant talkers, but when they natter on too long, the highly theatrical author causes a grotesque face to appear at a window, drops someone through a trap door or stages a preposterous recognition scene." These melodramatic touches come naturally to Davies who, L. J. Davis remarked, "is a player in love with the play, and the kind of play he loves is melodrama." In his collection of lectures, *The Mirror of Nature*, Davies makes his case on behalf of melodrama and attempts, as Alberto Manguel wrote in the *Toronto Globe & Mail*, "to save melodrama's lost honor." Davies's lectures argue that "theatre is a coarse art. ... It appeals immediately to primary, not secondary elements in human nature." Melodrama's emphasis on creating an emotional response in its audience, Davies contends, is true to theater's fundamental purpose.

**Davies's Legacy** Many critics have labeled Davies a traditionalist who was a bit old-fashioned in his approach to writing. I. M. Owen of *Saturday Night*, for example,

placed Davies “curiously apart from the mainstream of contemporary fiction.” A critic for the *Washington Post Book World* characterized Davies as “a true novelist writing imagined stories, wonderful stories full of magic and incandescence, thought and literary art,” something the critic did not find in other contemporary fiction. With such conflicting opinions, it is difficult to determine Davies’s long-term impact on literature.

### Works in Critical Context

**Davies, the Magician** Calling Davies “a compellingly inventive storyteller” who garnered an “affectionate following,” James Idema noted in the *Chicago Tribune Book World* that the appeal of Davies’s fiction lies in “his way of placing ordinary humans in the midst of extraordinary events, of bringing innocent, resolutely straight characters into contact with bonafide exotics.” Idema added that “the ‘real world’ interests [Davies] only as a starting point. Enigma, myth, illusion and magic are the stuff of his elegant stories.” Similarly, William Kennedy observed in the *New York Times Book Review* that Davies “conveys a sense of real life lived in a fully imagined if sometimes mythical and magical world.” Comparing the role of the novelist with that of a magician, because both “mean us to believe in what never happened and to this end use many conjuror’s tricks,” Prescott defined Davies as one writer “who takes seriously his magician’s role.”

**The Deptford Trilogy** Davies was already well established on the Canadian literary scene when his Deptford Trilogy brought him international attention. “These novels,” Claude Bissell stated in *Canadian Literature*, “comprise the major piece of prose fiction in Canadian literature—in scope, in the constant interplay of wit and intelligence, in the persistent attempt to find a pattern in this [as Davies states in the trilogy] ‘life of marvels, cruel circumstances, obscenities, and commonplaces.’”

Davies did not intend to write a trilogy when he first began *Fifth Business*. His initial story idea prompted him to write the novel, he told *Time* (Canada), “but he found almost as soon as he had finished that it wasn’t all he wanted to say.” So Davies wrote *The Manticore* to tell more of his story. Reviewers then asked “to hear about the magician who appeared in the other two novels,” Davies explained, “and I thought ‘Well, I know a lot about magicians’ and I wrote the third book.”

Despite the unplanned development of the trilogy, it garnered extensive critical praise and each volume has been an international best seller. The first volume, *Fifth Business*, is, Sam Solecki maintained in *Canadian Forum*, “Davies’s masterpiece.”

### Responses to Literature

1. Both Davies and Kafka use transformation as a key theme in their work. Discuss the difference between Kafka’s use of transformation in *The Metamorphosis*

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Davies’s novels are marked by their theatrical nature, which makes sense for an author who was first a part of the theater at the age of three. Authors often make observations about other art forms through works of their own. Any art form that comments upon or utilizes the conventions of another art form is broadly categorized as “metafiction.” Here are some more examples of metafiction.

*Life of Pi* (2001), a novel by Yann Martel. This book purports to tell the true tale of an Indian boy who survives a shipwreck and spends more than seven months sharing a lifeboat with a wild Bengal tiger.

*House of Leaves* (2001), a novel by Mark Z. Danielewski. In this novel, Danielewski uses extensive footnotes not only to further the plot of the novel, but also to make remarks about it.

*Don Quixote* (Part 1–1605, Part 2–1615), a novel by Miguel de Cervantes. In this novel, the hapless Don Quixote and his companion Sancho Panza imagine their lives as if they were characters in a romance novel and behave accordingly.

*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003), a novel by Mark Haddon. In the process of writing a detective story about the murder of his neighbor’s dog, the autistic young narrator of this work discusses what is necessary to make a novel good, thereby commenting on the nature of storytelling.

and Davies’s use in the Deptford Trilogy. What prompts transformation in these novels, how is the transformation shown, and what changes internally for the transformed characters?

2. Read *The Cunning Man*. The chronology of this novel is disjointed, continually jumping from here to there. What do you think Davies was trying to accomplish by using this nonlinear approach to his story? How did the technique affect your ability to enjoy the text?
3. Although Davies’s novels are often described as old-fashioned, his work as a columnist is altogether different. Take the time to read some of Davies’s journalistic work and compare it to that of a contemporary columnist, like Dave Barry. Compare the two in terms of ideas, structure, vocabulary, and concerns.

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## ☐ Simone de Beauvoir

BORN: 1908, Paris, France

DIED: 1986, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*She Came To Stay* (1943)

*The Second Sex* (1949)

*The Mandarins* (1954)

### Overview

Simone de Beauvoir is one of the best-known French writers and thinkers of the twentieth century, and among the best-known female writers of all time. Her study of the oppression of women throughout history, *The Second Sex* (1949), is a founding text of modern feminism. De Beauvoir was prominent in the circle of left-wing Parisian intellectuals associated with the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. Interest in her long-term relationship with Sartre and controversies around *The Second Sex* have often eclipsed recognition of de Beauvoir's fiction. Yet she was an acclaimed and popular novelist; *The Mandarins* (1954) received the prestigious Prix Goncourt. De Beauvoir was a perceptive witness to the twentieth century whose works span from her childhood days before World War I to the world of the 1980s.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**A Young Diarist** Simone de Beauvoir was born in the fourteenth *arrondissement*, or district, of Paris in 1908, and lived there most of her life. Her mother was a devout Catholic; her father, a lawyer, was agnostic. Despite a comfortable childhood, she rebelled against



Simone de Beauvoir Beauvoir, Simone de, photograph. Evening Standard / Getty Images

her parents' values at an early age, declaring that she would never become a housewife or mother. She also began to write when young, penning her first story at age eight and keeping a diary that would evolve into four published volumes of memoirs, starting with *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (1958).

**Alliance with Sartre** In 1925, she began studying philosophy at the Sorbonne. Four years later she met Jean-Paul Sartre, beginning an intimate personal and intellectual relationship that would continue until his death in 1980. They studied together and passed the *agrégation de philosophie* in 1929, placing first and second on the exam that provided their teaching credentials. At twenty-one, de Beauvoir was the youngest student ever to receive this prestigious degree. From 1931 to 1943, she taught philosophy at secondary schools in Marseilles, Rouen, and Paris.

Sartre and de Beauvoir were lovers and developed an unwavering partnership, but they never lived together. They rejected the institution of marriage, and neither wanted children. Furthermore, they did not exclude what



they called “contingent” affairs, some of which became important in their lives. In 1933, the pair attempted a *ménage à trois* with one of Sartre’s students, Olga Kosakiewicz. This experiment, and the anguish it caused, became the basis for de Beauvoir’s first novel, *She Came to Stay* (1943). The novel captures the hothouse atmosphere generated by the trio as the indolent intruder Xavière slowly destroys everything that surrounds her.

In the 1930s, de Beauvoir’s life was essentially that of a provincial professor with intellectual leanings, a wide circle of friends, and a somewhat bohemian lifestyle. Sartre was drafted to fight in the French army during World War II, and spent nine months as a prisoner of war. When he returned in 1941, he and de Beauvoir determined to become more involved in public life during the German occupation of France. Both abandoned their teaching to devote themselves to writing and often to political activism. De Beauvoir provides one of the most vivid accounts of life in France during the war in her memoir *The Prime of Life* (1960).

**Existentialism and Responsibility** The war was also central to her second novel, written during the German occupation. *The Blood of Others* (1945) alternates between the point of view of Jean Blomart, an active member of the Resistance fighting against the Nazis, and Helene Bertrand, who is shaken out of complacency when she sees the Gestapo, or Nazi secret police, snatch a Jewish child from her mother. After the death of a young friend he inspired to participate in a political demonstration, Jean wrestles with his responsibility for the deaths of others.

The theme of responsibility is a crucial element of the existentialist philosophy developed by Sartre. De Beauvoir agrees with Sartre that human beings are free, without a God to give meaning or purpose to their lives, in a world without preordained values. This freedom leads to anguish, because people can rely only on themselves and are thus responsible for everything that happens to them. De Beauvoir attempted to explain and popularize existentialism in several essays, including *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947) and *Existentialism and the Wisdom of the Ages* (1948). The simplicity of her writing style makes these texts more accessible than the abstruse, sometimes impenetrable prose of Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*.

**The Second Sex and The Mandarins** When de Beauvoir set out to begin her autobiography, she realized that she first needed to understand the extent to which being born female had influenced her life. She spent hours in the library seeking documentation for each section of the book that was to become the foundation of her international reputation. *The Second Sex* examines the historical, biological, and sociological origins of the oppression of women. The opening statement of the section on childhood, “One is not born a woman, one becomes one,” has become familiar throughout the

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

De Beauvoir’s famous contemporaries include:

**Jean-Paul Sartre** (1905–1980): French philosopher, novelist, and dramatist.

**Albert Camus** (1913–1960): French-Algerian novelist and philosopher who won the Nobel Prize in 1957.

**Nelson Algren** (1909–1981): American author of *The Man with the Golden Arm* and lover of Simone de Beauvoir.

**Anaïs Nin** (1903–1977): French-Cuban author famous for her voluminous diaries and relationship with Henry Miller.

**Marguerite Duras** (1914–1996): French author of experimental fiction.

**Charles de Gaulle** (1890–1970): French army general, leader of the Free French Forces during World War II, and later, president of France (1959–1969).

world. The book advises women to pursue meaningful careers and to avoid the status of “relative beings”—implicit, in de Beauvoir’s view, in marriage and motherhood.

When *The Second Sex* appeared in 1949, reactions ranged from the horrified gasps of conservative readers to the impassioned gratitude of millions of women who had never before encountered such a frank discussion of their condition. Reactions to the sections discussing the female anatomy and homosexuality were especially hostile. Nevertheless, the book was widely translated and served as a battle cry of feminism in the 1960s and afterward.

De Beauvoir’s best-received novel, *The Mandarins*, returns to the subject of the Nazi occupation of France. It presents the euphoria of Liberation Day in Paris as German troops were driven out, and the subsequent disillusionment of French intellectuals who found themselves dividing into factions as the glow of Resistance companionship and victory over the Nazis dimmed. De Beauvoir always denied that *The Mandarins* was a *roman à clef*, or a thinly-veiled memoir offered as fiction, with Robert Dubreuilh, Henri Perron, and Anne Dubreuilh representing Sartre, Albert Camus, and herself. Nonetheless, echoes of the developing rift between Sartre and Camus, and of the concern of French intellectuals over the Soviet work camps, are clearly audible throughout the novel.

**Her Life and Deaths** Most of the writing de Beauvoir produced after *The Mandarins* was nonfiction, beginning with her remarkable series of memoirs, invaluable documents for following the development of her career. *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* examines her early years and growing rebellion against bourgeois tradition. *The Prime of Life* treats the continuing dialogue between

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

*The Second Sex* has a prominent place in the literature of women's liberation. Here are a few other landmark texts of modern feminism.

*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), a treatise by Mary Wollstonecraft. A passionate argument in favor of granting educational opportunities to women.

*A Room of One's Own* (1929), an essay by Virginia Woolf. For a woman to write creatively, this famous novelist argues, she needs only two things: money and a room of her own.

*The Feminine Mystique* (1963), a nonfiction work by Betty Friedan. This influential American book from the 1960s encourages women to look beyond homemaking and childrearing in search of their real identity and potential.

*In a Different Voice* (1982), a nonfiction work by Carol Gilligan. A psychologist questions the relationship between gender and ethical reasoning.

de Beauvoir and Sartre from 1929 to 1944, including the development of the existentialist movement. *The Force of Circumstance* (1963), focuses on the postwar years and reflects the author's political awareness; it is written with anguish over the French military involvement in Algeria.

*The Force of Circumstance* reveals its maturing author's concerns with aging and death. In the year of its publication, 1963, de Beauvoir's mother died from cancer. In the moving pages of *A Very Easy Death* (1964), the author recaptures the warmth of her childhood relationship with her mother, and shares with her readers the anxiety of knowing more about her mother's condition than she could reveal to her, as well as the pain of helplessly watching a life ebb away. Sartre considered *A Very Easy Death* de Beauvoir's best work. De Beauvoir also published an important study of the social conditions of aging, entitled *Old Age* (1970).

Seventeen years after the passing of de Beauvoir's mother, Jean-Paul Sartre died. De Beauvoir wrote *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre* (1981), a companion piece to *A Very Easy Death*, to cope with the anguish of watching age and illness take their toll on her companion of fifty years. De Beauvoir notes that *Adieux* differs from her previous work in that Sartre did not read it before its publication.

Simone de Beauvoir died in a Paris hospital on April 14, 1986. She was buried in the same grave as were Sartre's ashes. Five thousand people attended the funeral, and flowers sent by women's organizations around the world attested to the renown of this beloved woman of letters.

## Works in Literary Context

As de Beauvoir recounts in her autobiography, she was a precocious writer and avid reader of female authors such as George Eliot and Louisa May Alcott. In her adolescence, a cousin introduced her to French authors such as André Gide, Jean Cocteau, and Alain-Fournier. Her mother, scandalized by such literature, pinned together pages of books she did not want her daughters to read. De Beauvoir later acknowledged the influence of John Dos Passos and Ernest Hemingway on her novelistic techniques.

Obviously, her intellectual partner Sartre provided a shaping influence on all her published prose. The pair wrote about the same ideas, and reflected on their shared experiences. For example, it is tempting to compare de Beauvoir's first novel, *She Came to Stay* (1943), and Sartre's famous play *No Exit* (1944). Both texts were written in the wake of the couple's liaison with Olga Kosakiewicz. Both have three main characters, two women and a man, and both convey the fundamental theme that hell is the way other people would have us see ourselves.

**Philosophy in Fiction** De Beauvoir's fiction illustrates in concrete terms the major themes of her philosophical essays, although her fiction is more ambiguous and its tone less authoritative. Her characters are determined neither by heredity nor by childhood experiences. They are free at each moment to choose their destiny. But they must recognize that they are free. Rather than offering a psychological explanation of their acts, de Beauvoir gives them an existential dimension.

**Freedom and Bad Faith** For readers familiar with de Beauvoir's memoirs, several of her characters are more or less transparent versions of the author herself, such as Françoise in *She Came to Stay*. Another character present in each of the novels is the unloved woman who would abdicate her freedom to possess the man she loves: Helene in *The Blood of Others*, who is in love with Jean; and Paule in *The Mandarins*, who loves Henri. These characters represent, in de Beauvoir's fictional world, those members of the "second sex" who accept the image imposed on them by society, and suffer as a consequence. They portray the existentialist notion of bad faith because they deny their freedom to stray from conventional female roles.

**An Icon of Women's Liberation** Although the novels of Simone de Beauvoir successfully dramatize the main ideas of her thinking, it is *The Second Sex* that has had the most profound influence. This pioneering work of scholarship has touched the lives of millions of women, setting the terms for the explosion of feminist theory and activism since the 1960s. Most of the leading advocates for women's rights in the West have heralded her leadership. Gloria Steinem, for example, remarked in the *New York Times* that "More than any other single human being, she's responsible for the current international women's movement."

## Works in Critical Context

De Beauvoir's literary career was very successful. Her first two novels, and most of her subsequent books, were critically and commercially well received. *The Blood of Others*, published in 1945, is remembered as the first French novel to speak openly about the Resistance movement. Critical examinations of de Beauvoir's novels, however, often focus more on their autobiographical details rather than on their literary merits, because of de Beauvoir's status as a historic figure of the twentieth century, and the many illustrious contemporaries who pepper the pages of her novels and memoirs.

Since 1973, when de Beauvoir publicly declared herself to be a feminist, her novels have tended to receive less critical attention than her nonfiction and, to a lesser extent, her memoirs. Most scholarly commentary has been directed at *The Second Sex*. If the novels have been examined, it is to analyze the ways female characters were represented. An interest in de Beauvoir's feminism seems to have overshadowed concern for her existentialism.

**The Second Sex** Several critics have taken de Beauvoir to task for her apparently negative presentation of women and their values. Jean Leighton perceives an antifeminine bias in *The Second Sex* that extends to the portrayal of femininity in de Beauvoir's novels. Biographer Carol Ascher speaks of her subject's "grim view of women's condition." More incisively, Mary Evans perceives in de Beauvoir an assumption that "traditionally male activities (the exercise of rationality, independent action, and so on) are in some sense superior, and are instances almost of a higher form of civilization than those concerns—such as childcare and the maintenance of daily life—that have traditionally been the preserve of women." Conversely, others have argued that de Beauvoir's depiction of women reveals anger at their circumstances, not their inherent inferiority. Regardless of this criticism, de Beauvoir is considered one of the most important champions of women's rights, and one of the century's foremost intellectuals.

## Responses to Literature

1. Explain de Beauvoir's argument, in the introduction to *The Second Sex*, that "woman is the Other." What does that mean and how is that concept manifested in everyday life?
2. Write about de Beauvoir's insights on the subject of death, citing two or more of her works. Can this insight be traced throughout de Beauvoir's works? Can you put this perspective into a succinct phrase that summarizes de Beauvoir's thoughts?
3. Simone de Beauvoir wrote extensively about her life, in four volumes of memoirs. The events and characters of her life story also show up, thinly disguised, in her novels. Locate one or two pivotal events in her life, and contrast how she portrays them in her fiction and in her autobiography.
4. Write about the variety of women characters in de Beauvoir's fiction. Collectively, what do they indicate about her perspective on women's experience? Select two that have made an impact on you; describe them and explain what makes them unique.

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## Daniel Defoe

BORN: 1660, London, England

DIED: 1731, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Novels, essays, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719)

*The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders* (1721)

*A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722)

*A Fortunate Mistress* (1724)



Daniel Defoe *Defoe, Daniel, drawing. The Library of Congress.*

## Overview

Daniel Defoe has been called the father of both the novel and modern journalism. In his novels, Defoe combined elements of spiritual autobiography, allegory, and so-called “rogue biography” with stylistic techniques including dialogue, setting, symbolism, characterization, and, most importantly, irony to fashion some of the first realistic narratives in English fiction. With this combination, Defoe popularized the novel among a growing middle-class readership. In journalism, he pioneered the lead article, investigative reporting, advice and gossip columns, letters to the editor, human interest features, background articles, and foreign-news analysis.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***Persecution, Plague, and Fire*** Defoe was born sometime in 1660, the youngest of three children, to James and Alice Foe in the parish of St. Giles Cripplegate, just north of the old center of London. The year 1660 also marked the restoration of the monarchy in England. King Charles I had been executed in 1649, and the British monarchy was abolished. The English king was considered head of the Anglican Church, so the execution of Charles I had religious meaning as well. England was ruled by a representative, and Puritan, government

for the first time, headed by Oliver Cromwell. Defoe’s parents were Presbyterians and Cromwell supporters. Thus the return of the Royalists (supporters of Charles II) was something of a tragedy for them and others of their faith, for they were Nonconformists or Dissenters to the established Church of England. The Royalists established a series of punitive laws against Dissenters, much as the Puritans had done to Anglicans during Cromwellian times. Thus young Daniel Defoe was plagued from his earliest years by a sense of ostracism and discrimination on account of his beliefs.

Little is known of Defoe’s youth, but it is highly likely that he was on some level influenced by the Great Plague of 1665, which at its peak killed one thousand people a week in London, and the Great Fire of London in 1666, which halted the plague but devastated the city. Defoe would later write of the plague, although it is doubtful whether he actually experienced it on a personal level. The Great Fire, however, certainly touched Defoe more closely, for it transformed London from a city of wood to a modern metropolis rebuilt in brick and stone.

***A Scholar and Businessman*** When he was sixteen, Defoe attended an academy in Newington Green, north of London, operated by the Reverend Charles Morton. As Dissenters, members of the Foe family were barred from attending the elite universities at Oxford or Cambridge, but at Morton’s academy Defoe gained an enduring love of science. He also developed an ability to write with not only clarity but also “Energy,” as he termed it.

After three years there, he set out into the world of business. Off and on for the rest of his life, Defoe would work as a businessman in England and Scotland. In his career, he sold stockings, speculated in land, expeditions, and inventions, imported goods from Continental Europe and the New World, and operated brick and tile works. He was at times successful, at others careless, and often unfortunate. By 1703, his business dealings had forced him to suffer several lawsuits, two terms in prison, and two bankruptcies.

In 1684 he married Mary Tuffley, the daughter of a successful merchant. They would have seven children together (though by some accounts Mary is believed to have given birth to at least eight), yet little is known about Mary and the relationship the couple shared.

***Politics and Intrigue*** During the 1680s and 1690s, Defoe’s activities centered on two fronts: commerce and political involvement. His far-flung business and investment ventures culminated in bankruptcy in 1692, and he was left owing his creditors the monumental sum of seventeen thousand pounds. Before this point he had already spent two terms in debtors’ prison; with bankruptcy he sought refuge in London’s Whitefriars, the site of a former monastery that remained a sanctuary where warrants could not be served. There he came into contact with thieves and prostitutes, characters who would later fill the pages of his fiction.

In 1697 he published his first important work, *Essay upon Projects*, and four years later made his name known with his long poem *The True-Born Englishman*, his effort to counter a growing English xenophobia, or hatred of foreigners. This poem, which satirized the prejudices of his fellow countrymen and called the English a race of mongrels, sold more copies in a single day than any other poem in English history. It was about this time that Daniel Foe began calling himself Defoe.

In 1702's *The Shortest Way with Dissenters*, Defoe wrote anonymously in the voice of those who would further limit the rights of Dissenters, exaggerating their positions in an attempt to make them appear absurd. Unfortunately, Defoe's satire was grossly misunderstood. He won scorn from both sides of the issue and was accused of seditious libel, lying to stir up rebellion against the government. Once arrested, he was forced to spend three consecutive days in the stocks, each day in a different part of London. The authorities thought that such a punishment might lead to death for the headstrong writer, as did Defoe, who attempted to mellow public sentiment against him by writing another poem, *A Hymn to the Pillory*. It was published on the very day he was put into the stocks; instead of stones, those who came to see his punishment threw flowers.

Defoe's time in hiding and his prison term sent his business into chaos, forcing him to declare bankruptcy for a second time. Thus, when a proposal to work for the Tories was put to him, Defoe readily agreed. His prison term was cut short on condition that he work for the Catholic monarchy, turning his considerable propaganda powers to the service of the state rather than the criticism of it. Among other duties, he spied on fellow Dissenters and others who were against the ruling government.

Working for Secretary of State Robert Harley for a fee of two hundred pounds a year, Defoe founded the *Review of the Affairs of France, with Observations on Transactions at Home* in 1704 and continued writing it for over nine years. That the paper promoted Harley's views—pro-Anglican, anti-Dissenter, against foreign entanglements—did not seem to bother Defoe, who had the ability to write from different perspectives. He produced the journal two to three times per week for almost a decade, laying it to rest in June of 1713. During that period he sowed the seeds for modern journalism, exploring the issues of the day through reporting and commentary while including poetry, letters to the editor, advice columns, and schedules for local events.

**Robinson Crusoe** Defoe's lasting fame for most readers lies with the book that he published in 1719, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner*, better known to modern readers simply as *Robinson Crusoe*. Defoe had long been developing the tools of his trade: point of view, dialogue, characterization, and a sense of scene. With *Robinson Crusoe* he put these together for the first time in a continuous creative

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Defoe's famous contemporaries include:

**William Kidd** (c. 1645–1701): Scottish sailor and pirate who allegedly left buried treasure in either Japan or the Caribbean.

**Louis XIV** (1638–1715): French king known as the Sun King; he centralized state authority and was a patron of the arts.

**Catherine I** (1684–1727): the first woman to rule Russia; wife and widow of Peter the Great.

**Sir Christopher Wren** (1632–1723): English architect and astronomer; rebuilt much of London after the Great Fire, including St. Paul's Cathedral.

**Jonathan Swift** (1667–1745): Anglo-Irish poet, political writer, and satirist; best known for *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and *A Modest Proposal* (1729).

product. Employing the form of a travel biography, the work tells the story of a man marooned on a Caribbean island. He quickly followed it with *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1720).

Like all great creative works, *Robinson Crusoe* lends itself to myriad interpretations: as an allegorical representation of the British Empire, an attack on economic individualism and capitalism, a further installment in the author's spiritual biography, and as a lightly veiled allegory of Defoe's own life. Most importantly, however, is the fact that the novel was read widely by Defoe's contemporaries in England. It was the first work to become popular among the middle and even lower classes, who could identify with Crusoe's adventures.

With the success of *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe saw that he might turn even a better profit than he had with his poetry and pamphlets. As a result, the period 1719–1724 saw an enormous output of work.

**1722–1724** In 1722, Defoe published *Moll Flanders* as well as *Journal of the Plague Year* and *Colonel Jack*. He was not content, however, with this achievement, but interspersed the fiction with several nonfiction books of history and social and religious manners. Another fictional biography, *Moll Flanders* is told by Moll herself to a rather embarrassed editor who cleans up her language. In its pages, Defoe was able to use the criminals and prostitutes he had rubbed shoulders with during his time in hiding and in jail.

*A Journal of the Plague Year* is a historical novel set during the London Plague of 1665 and 1666. The novel is narrated by one "H. F.," a man likely modeled on



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

*Robinson Crusoe* is a meditation on the human condition and an argument for challenging traditional notions about that condition. With this work, Defoe applied and thereby popularized modern realism. Modern realism holds that truth should be discovered at the individual level by verification of the senses. The following titles represent other modern realist works.

*Candide* (1759), a novel by Voltaire. This novel parodies German philosopher Gottfried Leibnitz's philosophy of optimism, which states that since God created the world and God is perfect, everything in the world is ultimately perfect.

*Don Quixote* (1605), a novel by Miguel de Cervantes. One of the great comic figures of world literature, drawn with realist and humanist techniques, Don Quixote is an idealistic but delusionary knight-errant with an illiterate but loyal squire, Sancho Panza.

*Peer Gynt* (1867), a play by Henrik Ibsen. This play, originally a long poem, pokes fun at then-emerging trends about getting back to nature and simplicity and asks questions about the nature of identity; the main character longs for freedom in a world that demands commitment.

*Gulliver's Travels* (1726), a novel by Jonathan Swift. A political satire in the form of an adventure, this novel examines the question of rationality being the greatest human quality, versus humankind's inborn urge to sin.

Defoe's own uncle, Henry Foe. *Colonel Jack*, another biographical novel, is set in the underworld of thieves and pickpockets, and traces Jack's fortunes as he tries to succeed through honest work. *A Fortunate Mistress* (1724), better known as *Roxana*, the last of Defoe's novels, introduces Defoe's first introspective narrator, foreshadowing the psychological novels that would someday follow. Many critics claim *Roxana* to be Defoe's most complex and artistic work, though it has not retained the same popularity as has *Robinson Crusoe* or *Moll Flanders*.

**Later Years** After *Roxana*, Defoe concentrated almost exclusively on longer nonfiction works. By the mid-1720s, his journalistic career came to an end when it was discovered that Defoe had been working as a government agent all the while, spying on other publishers. Over the years, he founded several journals, but these also had ceased publication by 1725. In 1729 legal proceedings were initiated against Defoe; with creditors on his track again, the writer once more went into hiding to avoid jail. Leaving his family behind in the suburbs, Defoe took lodgings in a section of London near where

he was born, but he suffered from gout and kidney stones. Defoe died in hiding on April 26, 1731. Obituaries of the day spoke of Defoe's varied writing abilities and his promotion of civic and religious freedom, but none mentioned that he was the author of either *Robinson Crusoe* or *Moll Flanders*.

## Works in Literary Context

**An English Breed of Novel** *Robinson Crusoe* is considered by some to be the first true English novel and by others to be the immediate precursor to the novels of Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding. John Robert Moore notes that before *Robinson Crusoe* "there was no English novel worth the name, and no book (except the Bible) widely accepted among all classes of English and Scottish readers." Irish author James Joyce also recognized *Crusoe* as a model of the Englishman, commenting that "the whole Anglo-Saxon spirit is in *Crusoe*: the manly independence; the unconscious cruelty; the persistence; the slow yet efficient intelligence; the sexual apathy; the practical, well-balanced religiousness; the calculating taciturnity."

**Rogue Biography** Not considered quite decent in its day, *Moll Flanders* was nonetheless popular with the reading public. As with Charles Dickens in his novel *Oliver Twist*, Defoe brings the criminal element vibrantly to life within its pages. Its form is an extension of what was known as rogue biography. Naturalistic novels such as Émile Zola's *Nana* (1880) and Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) opened up the possibilities of a critical evaluation of *Moll Flanders*, just as the relaxed moral standards of the 1960s made possible the republication of John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* (1749), which was influenced by Defoe's work.

**Precursor to the Gothic Novel** *Journal of the Plague Year* developed new fictional ground that would later be taken over by the gothic novel. Defoe's prose style conveys a sense of gripping immediacy; he frequently works with loose sentences that tend to accumulate in the manner of breathless street gossip and unpremeditated outcome, thus making his *Journal* a compelling work of art that possesses, as Anthony Burgess has noted, "the truth of the conscientious and scrupulous historian, but its deeper truth belongs to the creative imagination." Along with *Robinson Crusoe*, *Journal of the Plague Year* formed a model for the exploitation of dramatic and sublime scenes in the novel, effects that the gothic novel would later borrow to good effect.

## Works in Critical Context

"Defoe's literary reputation is probably higher today than it has ever been," Maximillian Novak has stated. "Many modern critics look to *Robinson Crusoe*, along with Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, as a key work in the formation of

the novel; and *Moll Flanders*, *Journal of the Plague Year*, and *Roxana* have been praised as masterpieces.”

**Robinson Crusoe** Despite its popular acceptance, *Robinson Crusoe* received a mixed reception from scholars of Defoe’s time, who found the novel to be un-Christian in tone. Academics also attacked it for being wildly improbable. Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau was one of the first to applaud *Robinson Crusoe* as a highly instructive book, in 1762. Novelist Sir Walter Scott in 1827 praised *Robinson Crusoe* for its realism. Defoe’s stature continued to grow during the nineteenth century. His eighteenth-century reputation as a literary hack who was willing to write for any cause was replaced by a close study of his work that showed he was the equal of his contemporary Jonathan Swift and one of the fathers of the English novel. Virginia Woolf, in her *Collected Essays*, called *Robinson Crusoe* “a masterpiece,” and went on to note that “it is a masterpiece because Defoe has throughout kept consistently to his own sense of perspective.” Crusoe has been seen as a representative of mankind at struggle with nature, or religion, or himself. Karl Marx and others have found much to do with the economic nature of man in Crusoe’s experience on the island. Although James Joyce explored the colonialist theme of *Robinson Crusoe* as early as 1911, his comments were not published until 1964. Since then, writers such as Toni Morrison, Derek Walcott, and Edward Said have viewed the novel as an allegory of colonialism.

**Moll Flanders** Most modern criticism of *Moll Flanders* focuses on the sense of sin and repentance in the novel. On the surface, Moll repents the sinful ways of her past, yet Defoe’s realistic tone in describing these past events seems to contradict this high moral purpose. Some critics attribute conscious irony to Defoe and maintain that Defoe was satirizing the puritanical rules of his day. On the other side of the argument are critics such as Ian Watt, who believes that if there is irony in Defoe, it is unintended.

## Responses to Literature

1. Much of Defoe’s success as a journalist—and as a spy—came from being able to argue in favor of issues he did not support. How important is it to be able to argue the other side of an argument? Does it lead to a better understanding of the issues, or is it simply a sign of someone who cannot make up his or her mind?
2. Defoe worked undercover as a spy and lived in hiding or in jail for long periods of time. Do you think that changed how he saw the world? If you had to be separated from your family for a long time, how would that change you?
3. The popular TV show *Survivor* implies that the only way to survive is by “playing a game” and deceiving other people. Research Karl Marx’s ideas about

capitalism. Keeping in mind that the point of *Survivor* is to win money, write an essay examining how Marx and Defoe would view the show.

4. *Robinson Crusoe* sparked interest in adventure stories set on desert islands. Research two or three adventure stories from different periods, such as *Swiss Family Robinson*, *Treasure Island*, and *Lord of the Flies*. Are they just exciting stories, or do they have a serious point? Write an essay discussing the point of these stories, and how that point changes over time.

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## Anita Desai

BORN: 1937, Mussoorie, India

NATIONALITY: Indian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Cry, the Peacock* (1963)

*Voices in the City* (1965)

*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975)

*In Custody* (1984)

*Journey to Ithaca* (1995)

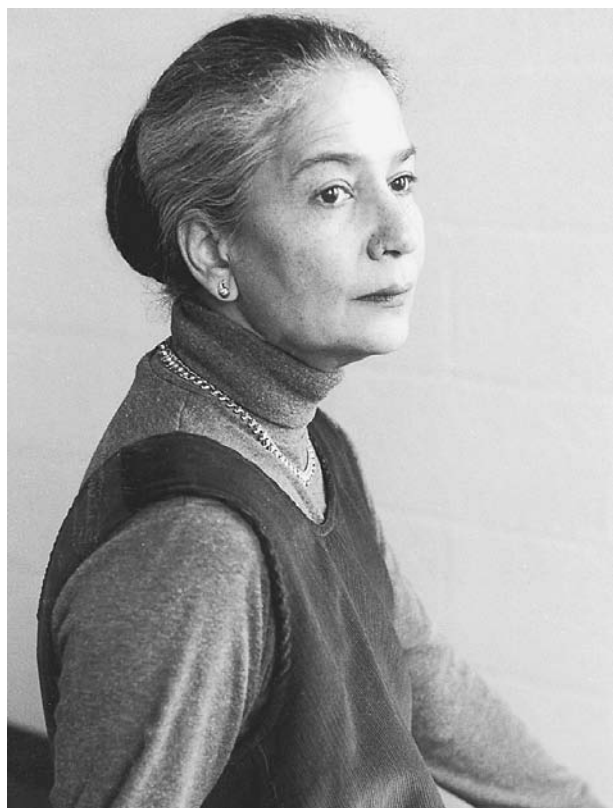
## Overview

Anita Desai is a leading member of a generation of writers who have carved out a niche for Indian fiction in English—today a burgeoning literary arena with writers of Indian descent or origin chiming in from around the world. Through sensitive psychological probing and sharp social critique, her novels chart the emotional lives of people struggling to find meaning and stability within the framework of a society in transition.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

### *A Cosmopolitan Childhood in Northern India*

Anita Mazumdar was born on June 24, 1937, in the hill resort of Mussoorie in northern India, to Dhiren N. Mazumdar, a businessman, and his German wife, Antoinette Nime Mazumdar. Because of her mixed parentage, Mazumdar learned German, English, and Hindi. Early in childhood, she did not experience her hybrid identity as a



Anita Desai Desai, Anita, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

clash of cultures, although at the time questions of hybrid identity were particularly pertinent in India, which gained its independence from Great Britain and separated from largely Muslim Pakistan in 1947 (when Anita was ten). The young Anita's mother lent a European element to what Desai would later describe as the family's otherwise "very, very Indian home": she told the children German fairy tales, sang and played "O Tannenbaum" on the piano at Christmas, and played recordings of the music of Ludwig van Beethoven, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Edvard Grieg on the gramophone. Books by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, and Heinrich Heine were on the bookshelves. The parents' friends included Germans, Hungarians, French, Russians, and Britons, and the young Anita's early years were thus shaped by an unusually lively cultural interplay—even for India, itself vibrantly multicultural.

**The Writer of the Family** As a German married to an Indian, Antoinette Mazumdar was twice removed from the English "raj," whom both she and her husband hated. She rejected the English practice of sending children away to boarding schools at "home" in England, and Anita was educated by the Grey Sisters of the Cambridge Mission at Queen Mary's Higher Secondary School. Anita wrote her first story at seven. Her early

scribblings were viewed with some amusement by her family. Later, when she began to publish, amusement gave way to pride. In 2002, long after her marriage and change of name, Desai recalled being labeled "the writer in the family," a role she accepted because she "really never considered another." After completing her schooling at Queen Mary's, Mazumdar attended Miranda House, a women's college on the campus of Delhi University. She published occasional pieces in the college magazine, and in 1957 her short story "Circus Cat, Alley Cat" appeared in the New Delhi periodical *Thought*. That year, she obtained a bachelor's degree with honors in English literature and won the Pershad Memorial Prize for English. For the next year she worked at Max Müller Bhavan, the German cultural institute in Calcutta (now known as Kolkata). During this period, tensions between India's Hindu and Muslim populations ran high, as the division of British India into India and Pakistan had been a historically traumatic event—with perhaps half a million people killed and over 12 million left homeless—from which the country has still today not entirely recovered.

**The Secret Writer** On December 13, 1958, she married Ashvin Desai, a business executive, with whom she had four children: Rahul, Tani, Arjun, and Kiran. Recalling this marriage, she later wrote, "The world I entered on marriage was completely uncomprehending of a life of literature. I continued to write but almost in secret, without anyone observing me at work at my desk so as not to create an open conflict."

After publishing two pieces in local magazines, Desai's first novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, was published in 1963. From her first work, readers see the stream-of-consciousness influence of Virginia Woolf on a writer who was seeking to create above-average characters "driven to some extremity of despair," she once told interviewer Yashodhara Dalmia. Such despair is also experienced by the protagonists of Desai's second novel, *Voices in the City* (1965). In *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* (1971), Desai moved away from the existential angst of her first two novels to explore the clash of Eastern and Western cultures in an English setting.

**International Acclaim and Concerns with Globalization** Desai's fifth novel *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) brought her international fame. The British Royal Society of Literature awarded her the Winifred Holtby Prize for the novel in 1978, and the work won the National Academy of Letters Award in India the same year.

In 1978, Desai published *Games at Twilight and Other Stories*. The book was well received in the United Kingdom, and in 1979 the novel won Desai the Sahitya Akademi award. In 1980 Desai published *Clear Light of Day*, perhaps her most autobiographical work to date. The novel was short-listed for the prestigious British Booker Prize. In 1982 Desai published *The Village by the Sea: An Indian Family Story*. In an interview with



Feroza Jussawalla and Reed Way Dassenbrock, she elaborated on her sense of an altered India, calling it “a place of increasing violence and of tremendous change . . . an economic revolution, of course, more than a political one at the moment, a place where life has become extremely difficult to endure.” The revolution she was responding to, both in the interview and in the book, was the revolution brought about in Indian life by economic globalization—a process that many have criticized for its insensitivity to the lives of the people who are being “modernized.”

A particularly notorious example of this insensitivity was the Bhopal disaster of 1984, when a Union Carbide pesticide plant released tons of gas into the air, killing somewhere between three and eight thousand people instantly, and an estimated twenty thousand or so more over the long term (with another one to six hundred thousand still injured today, over two decades later). Union Carbide paid some minimal reparations, and Dow Chemical Company, which now owns Union Carbide, has refused to revisit the issue, disavowing any responsibility for the history of its subsidiary. Although *Village by the Sea* was published before the Bhopal disaster, it was prescient in its concern with the effects of international economic pressures in an India desperate for capital. The novel won the *Guardian Prize for Children's Fiction* in 1983 and was adapted for television by the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1992.

Whereas her novels had been primarily woman-centered up to this point, in her next novel, *In Custody* (1984), Desai moved to write from a male point of view. While focusing on the protagonist's process of incurring resentment and being exploited as he takes a hiatus to seek out his guru, the novel addresses the politics of language in postcolonial India, where the dominance of Hindi threatens the Urdu language and culture with extinction. *In Custody* was also short-listed for the Booker Prize.

**No More Secret Writing Sessions** Desai has been honored with accolades that include fellowships, visiting professorships, and prestigious awards such as the Tara-knath Das Award for Contributions to Indo-American Understanding in 1989 and the 1990 Padma Shri, one of the highest national awards in India. After her third novel was short-listed for the Booker Prize, *Fasting, Feasting* (1995), and the 1999 Moravia Prize for Literature in Rome, Desai continued to explore Indian issues in an international context.

Early in her career, Desai was compelled to write in secret to avoid conflict with her husband's family; today her daughter Kiran is also a novelist. “This makes,” Desai has explained, “for a great intimacy and companionship between us, the first I have ever experienced.” Today, Desai spends most of the year in the United States, where she is a professor emeritus of humanities at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Having left India

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Desai's famous contemporaries include:

**Sawako Ariyoshi** (1931–1984): This Japanese writer was a prolific novelist. Her works concerned significant social issues such as environmental pollution and treatment of the elderly.

**Graham Chapman** (1941–1989): An English comic actor who was a core member of the comedy troupe Monty Python.

**Joan Crawford** (1937–): This American basketball player has been inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame, the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame, and Amateur Athletic Union Hall of Fame.

**Roberta Flack** (1937–): This American jazz and blues singer is a Grammy Award winner for such songs as the 1974 “Killing Me Softly with His Song,” which the Fugees remade in 1996.

only late in life, she does not consider herself part of the Indian Diaspora, but she is certainly seen by many as one of contemporary India's greatest literary figures.

### Works in Literary Context

Desai was a voracious reader of the books on her parents' shelves, including the works of the Brontës, Jane Austen, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Marcel Proust. Gradually she gravitated toward poetry, which became a major influence on her work. From Japanese and Chinese poetry she absorbed the art of fine detail and subtle description. Sufi poetry, especially that of Rumi, and the work of modern Russian poets, including Boris Pasternak, Anna Akhmatova, and Osip Mandelstam, figure in her list of favorites. In an interview with Pandit, Desai described these writers as the “gurus” from whom she learned the art of writing.

**Suggestion Versus Statement** As a stylist, Desai is known for her intense and suggestive use of imagery. In *In Custody*, for example, backward, decaying, and dreary Mirpore functions as an image of contemporary India. The most powerful element in *Voices in the City* is that of Calcutta, with its many evocative landmarks. At times the imagery lends a poetic quality to her prose. Madhusudan Prasad remarks that Desai's novels have a “mosaic textual density” because “Desai's imagery is wedded to her rich lyricism.” Images recur with cumulative effect as Desai eschews blunt, direct statements, instead using suggestion to highlight thematic issues.

**Toward an Environmental Psychology** Desai evokes the sights, sounds, and smells of Calcutta and

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by other authors who have treated key aspects of Indian culture and the politics of gender roles:

*The English Teacher* (1945), a novel by R. K. Narayan. In this semiautobiographical work, English teacher Krishna seeks to evolve from his humdrum life to a place of enlightenment.

*Kanthapura* (1938), a novel by Raja Rao. In this work, the author closely explores the teachings of Mohandas Gandhi as a passive resistor of British rule and investigates the mythologizing of the great leader.

*Nectar in a Sieve* (1955), a novel by Kamala Markandaya. In this award-winning work, the author presents an in-depth look at the culture clashes between urban and rural Indians.

*A Room of One's Own* (1929), an exposition by Virginia Woolf. In this book-length essay, the author explores the early politics of women writers and writing.

other cities, but her focus remains psychological: The city is often a force that controls the mental states of its inhabitants. Desai calls up internal states of mind while recording sharply detailed impressions of social interactions. She uses imagery to create a sharply defined concrete reality that suggests more abstract possibilities.

Over the course of her novels, Desai has evolved from chronicling the inner lives of her characters to an awareness of the links between individual psychology and the social and cultural environment. The protagonists of her novels are often caught in a struggle between desire for freedom and the call of duty or responsibility, often expressed through family relationships. She also explores the problems faced by women in contemporary India, particularly middle-class women expected to lead lives of quiet domesticity in a rapidly changing world. In *Voices in the City*, for example, Otima, who is associated with the powerful, destructive Hindu goddess Kali, explodes the myth of motherhood by rejecting her children and retreating to her childhood home in Kalimpong.

### Works in Critical Context

As the *Encyclopedia of World Biography Supplement* (2005) suggests, “Despite the fact that Desai does not view herself as a political writer, her social commentary is considered to be powerfully and accurately rendered in her fiction.” Yet Desai perhaps has not gotten the critical attention her novels merit. *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* (1971) received a mixed response from critics, who had come

to expect intense psychologizing and rich, poetic prose from Desai. In *Perspectives on Anita Desai*, Prasad complains that the novel lacks dense imagery, while others, including S. Krishnamoorthy Aithal, recognized that the novel places Desai within the ranks of postcolonial writers impelled to explore the politics of the Indo-British cross-cultural encounter. The more recent *Journey to Ithaca* also received mixed reviews.

***Journey to Ithaca* (1995)** *Journey to Ithaca* is set during the hippie influx into India in the 1970s. Sophie, a German woman, accompanies her Italian husband, Matteo, on his journey to India in search of peace. In this novel, Desai’s shift from an individual to international perspective is even more pronounced—the narrative spans three continents and traces the lives of protagonists from Egypt, Europe, and India. *New York Times* critic Richard Bernstein praises Desai’s “remarkable eye for substance, the things that give life its texture.” But others—like Gabriele Annan in the *Times Literary Supplement*—complain that “The narrative is full of gaps and improbabilities, as well as clichés . . . the dialogue is stagey and unconvincing.” Bhaskar Ghose, however, argues in *Biblio* that the elegance of Desai’s craft “ultimately gives a definition to the story which could have been diffuse, or drearily familiar in the hands of a weaker artist. Within the body of her work, this novel must rank as one of the most ambitious and most tightly crafted works that Anita Desai has undertaken.”

### Responses to Literature

1. Several of Desai’s favorite themes include youth, age, and death; the minutiae of human relationships; art and life; illusion and reality; time and change; cultural differences; and the pressures of survival in an increasingly difficult world. Desai considers these themes in the context of Indian cultures and histories. In your study group, choose a theme and investigate its real-life context in Desai’s India. Share your findings with peers. For instance, who in a given context “should” be the repository of wisdom? What happens (or what is expressed differently) when a story is told from the perspective of an individual not expected to be a purveyor of wisdom? How do characters display feelings of alienation as Indians in a mixed culture?
2. Desai centers much of her writing on postcolonial India and the politics of the Indo-British cross-cultural encounter. What makes an encounter truly “cross-cultural”? Consider Desai’s descriptions of interactions between a variety of different characters; what makes some of these interactions cross-cultural and others not? How do you think Desai would define the boundaries of culture, and why? Support

your thesis with detailed analysis of concrete passages from Desai's fiction.

- Desai has noted that most of her novels describe the lives of women before the feminist movement gathered momentum in India. Investigate the goals of feminist literary criticism, and consider how you might apply such a reading to a Desai novel. What has this mode of reading helped you to notice that you might not have otherwise?

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## Ramón del Valle-Inclán

BORN: Villanueva de Arosa, Spain, 1866

DIED: Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 1936

NATIONALITY: Spanish

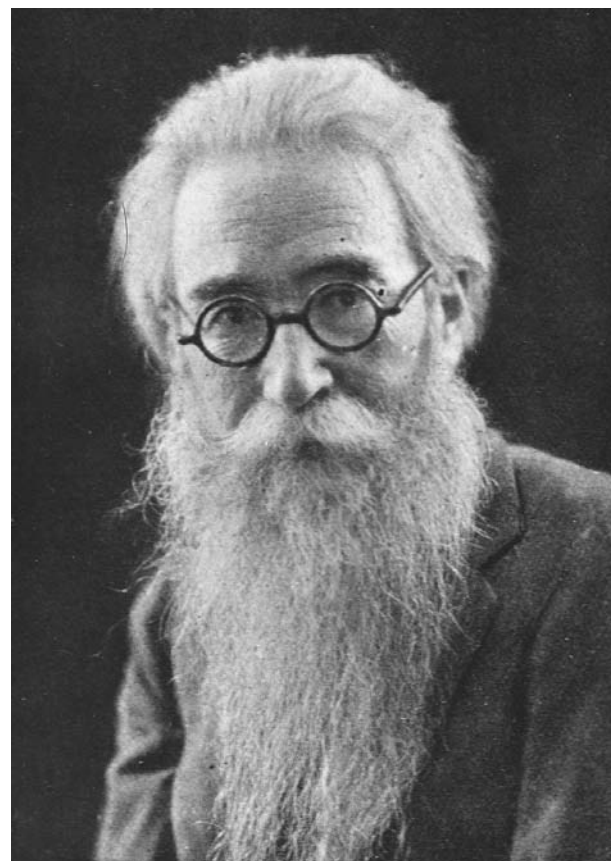
GENRE: Drama, Fiction, Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

*Femeninas: Seis historias amorosas (Feminines: Six Love Stories)* (1895)  
*Romance de lobos* (1908)  
*Lights of Bohemia* (1924)  
*The Tyrant* (1926)

### Overview

An acknowledged master of prose style, Ramón Maria del Valle-Inclán was one of the great modernizers of twentieth-century Spanish drama. He invented a new genre: the *esperpento*, in which all the elements of drama are



Ramon Maria del Valle-Inclan Roger Viollet Collection / Getty Images

satirically distorted to create Goyaesque images of horror and comedy. Conveying a sense of dehumanization and senseless struggle in an irrational world, the *esperpentos* are now seen as the forerunners of absurdist works such as those of Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco. In addition to his *esperpentos*, he is also known for his novels, particularly the *Sonatas*, a collection of elegantly styled, fictive memoirs of the rakish Marquis de Bradomin.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***A Restless Spirit in Need of Adventure*** Valle-Inclán was born to a family of disinherited aristocrats at Villanueva de Arosa in the region of Spain known as Galicia, and spent his youth in this rugged land of primitive Celtic customs. Educated in Pontevedra, he studied law briefly at the University of Santiago de Compostela, where he also began to write poetry and prose. Often described as restless and eager for adventure, he left for Mexico in 1890, claiming that he went there because “it was the only country whose name is written with an X.” He worked as a journalist in America for three years, then returned to Galicia. In the interim, he transformed his physical appearance: Valle-Inclán now wore long hair, a beard, and a cape, often carried a cane, and presented himself as an eccentric, bohemian writer. After publishing his first book, *Femeninas: Seis historias amorosas* (1895), he traveled to Madrid and began to move in the capital’s literary circles. By the turn of the century, Valle-Inclán had begun work on his *Sonatas*, the series of four novels that brought him fame in the early twentieth century. He recorded his impressions of World War I in *La media noche* (1917), a collection of essays written while he served as a newspaper correspondent on the Western Front.

***Dramatic Shift in Style*** Valle-Inclán’s literary development is generally divided into two periods. The first, extending from 1895 until World War I, is characterized by an end-of-the-century decadence, reminiscent of Barbey d’Aureville and Gabriele d’Annunzio. In *Femeninas*, a collection of love stories, Valle-Inclán employs an exquisite, romantic style while treating erotic themes. Similarly, in the *Sonata de otoño: Memorias del Marques de Bradomin* (1902; *Autumn Sonata: Memoirs of the Marquis of Bradomin*) he projects an overtly romantic portrait of himself as the Marquis of Bradomin. Also in this period, Valle-Inclán wrote the novel *Flor de santidad* (Flower of Sanctity; 1904) and the first two dramas known collectively as the *comedias barbaras*, *Aguila de blason* (1907) and *Romance de lobos* (1908), which draw on the traditions and folklore of his native Galicia.

***Carlism Stirs Controversy*** A controversial aspect of Valle-Inclán’s life is his adherence to Carlism. The Carlists were a branch of the Bourbon dynasty who claimed the right to the Spanish throne and held the most conservative positions with regard to absolutism, Catholicism, and

traditionalism. Although Valle-Inclán expressed his support for Carlism in many ways, some critics believe that his commitment to the cause was an aesthetic pose. His *La guerra carlista* trilogy (1908–1909; *The Carlist War*), historical novels of the Carlist Wars in Spain—the last major European civil wars—mark a first departure from the eroticism of his earlier works. Included in the trilogy were the novels *Los cruzados de la causa* (1908, *Crusaders of the Cause*), *Gerifaltes de antaño* (1909, *Gerifalcons of Yore*), and *El resplandor de la hoguera* (1909, *The Glow of the Bonfire*). In the first novel, which is set in Galicia, Bradomin is a committed Carlist trying to convey weapons to the soldiers. The following novels are set in the Basque and Navarre regions, where the hostilities actually took place. The unforgettable protagonist of *El resplandor de la hoguera*, the priest Santa Cruz, is a cruel warrior who is depicted as a fanatical and epic hero.

Following World War I, a drastic change took place in Valle-Inclán’s writing. In 1916, he outlined his new aesthetic theory in *The Lamp of Marvels*. Discarding the Decadents’ notion of the artist as one who finds pleasure in beauty, Valle-Inclán enunciated a disillusioned vision, which he hoped would achieve an objective view of reality and allow things to, in the words of Manuel Salas, “reveal their flaws and imperfections, their absurdities and dissonances.” Following the war, Valle-Inclán wrote his first *esperpento*, *Lights of Bohemia* (1924), and also composed dramas and novels, wherein he incorporated the satirical and grotesque elements of the *esperpento* form.

***Esperpentos*** In *Lights of Bohemia* and the *esperpentos* that followed, Valle-Inclán pursued this aesthetic, producing seriocomic distortions of reality. These later dramas focus on society and its conventions and deal with contemporary life, satirizing institutionalized vice, militarism, political corruption, and human frailty—all of which aligned Valle-Inclán more closely with the socially progressive Generation of 1898. His novels continue in the same spirit, as in *The Tyrant* (1926), the story of a rebellion in the fictional Latin American state of Tierra Caliente, wherein he analyzes the failures of Spanish society. This is also shown in the first novels of the *El reudo iberico* cycle, which indict Isabella II’s government. He also composed dramas and novels, wherein he incorporated the satirical and grotesque elements of the *esperpento* form. He began his *El ruedo iberico* cycle, a projected series of nine novels, in the late 1920s, but finished only two of the works—*La corte de los milagros* (1927) and *Viva mi dueño* (1928)—before his death. Ramón del Valle-Inclán and his wife were divorced in 1932. Valle-Inclán died of bladder cancer on January 5, 1936. He had chosen to return to die in Santiago de Compostela, where he had many friends, and to be buried, rejecting Catholic rites, in its small cemetery.

## Works in Literary Context

Ramón del Valle-Inclán was one of the most controversial literary figures in Spain in the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries. He was a reformer of the modern Spanish stage, an inventor of new narrative and dramatic modes, and a highly original re-creator of the Spanish language. Although Valle-Inclán wrote in Spanish, his ties to Galicia and the Galician language are discernible in the themes, vocabulary, and rhythms of his writings.

**Generation of '98** Although a writer of poems, essays, short stories, plays, and novels, Ramón del Valle-Inclán is most renowned as the prose stylist of the Generation of '98 whose works most clearly approach the modernist mode. For him there was no clear demarcation between prose and poetry, so his earlier critics argued about whether he should be classified as a modernist or as one of the members of the Generation of '98, who analyzed Spain's internal problems in their writings. Though these writers also experimented with aesthetics, they were more motivated to inspire a national consciousness. Because Valle-Inclán exhibited both characteristics in his writings, recent criticism has placed him within both literary camps. With his considerable emphasis on poetic style, it is ironic that only a few collections of poetry appear in his long list of credits; however, these works fit both thematically and stylistically within his overall literary production.

**Esperpentos** The term *esperpento* merits definition. Properly speaking, an object reflected in a concave mirror produces an *esperpento*—that is, an image distorted, hence grotesque and ridiculous. The *esperpento* is to reality what the caricature is to the portrait. This term is used by Valle-Inclán to characterize the product of his second style, essentially a humorous caricature of contemporary life. Such a deformation of a realistic genre descends directly from the picaresque. Like the picaresque or rogue novel, it has for its characters every social type from the highest to the lowest. The *esperpentos* are written in a broken Spanish filled with slang, dialect, interjections, and discordant elements; the dehumanized characters react mechanically in mean and vile ways.

In this form of literature Valle-Inclán shows himself the resolute foe of vice and ignorance, of injustice and oppression, in whatever guise; he takes us with him to visit palace and prison, café and saloon, street and square, church and cemetery. Through his pages flit kings and ministers, poets and novelists, Bohemians, and even Valle-Inclán himself, like shadows. He tells us that this form of caricatural vision was invented by the artist Francisco Goya in his sketches included under the motto: "The sleep of reason engenders monsters." The select and musical diction characteristic of the *Sonatas* is replaced in the *esperpentos* by the ampler and more varied speech of common life. The language is rich in slang and the jargon of gypsies and thieves. The grotesque element of the *esperpento* affords freer scope for the use of the comic, and wider range for the tragic.

**An Inspiration to Absurdist Drama** Valle-Inclán's reputation grew in foreign countries after his

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Valle-Inclán's famous contemporaries include:

**Bram Stoker** (1847–1912): Irish novelist, short story author, and theater manager who wrote the horror classic *Dracula* (1897), the most influential interpretation of the vampire myth ever written.

**Jack London** (1876–1916): American novelist and short-story writer who was one of the first writers to make his living exclusively from his stories. Famous chiefly for his realist, naturalist tales of adventure and man versus the elements in such stories as *The Call of the Wild* (1903), *The Sea-Wolf* (1904), and *White Fang* (1906).

**Gustave Charpentier** (1860–1956): French composer, whose first opera, *Louise* (1900), is also his best known. The opera, depicting the life of the working class, was part of the *verismo*, or realist, school of opera developing at the time.

**Rudyard Kipling** (1865–1936): English novelist and poet who enjoyed tremendous success in his own lifetime for his tales of colonial India and the British Empire. He wrote both children's and adults' stories; today his children's books are generally considered his best work.

**Alfonso XIII** (1886–1941): Alfonso ruled Spain from his birth to 1931, when the monarchy was abolished and the Second Republic was established. His reign saw the loss of the last of Spain's great overseas colonies in the Spanish-American War and the dictatorship of Primo Rivera.

death and in Spain during Francisco Franco's dictatorship from 1939 to 1975, even though censorship kept the full meaning of his work from being known. Since the political transition to democracy in the 1970s, Valle-Inclán's work has increasingly attracted the attention of critics, translators, and the general public. However, his success among English-speaking audiences is still greatly limited by a lack of available translations of his works. Despite this, Valle-Inclán is credited with being an important precursor to absurdist theater, inspiring authors such as Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Tom Stoppard.

### Works in Critical Context

Valle-Inclán's oeuvre has been discussed by critics largely in terms of temporal divisions. His early works, especially the *Sonatas*, won him popularity, though some critics disparaged their eroticism. By contrast, other critics regarded Valle-Inclán as one of the most significant writers of his time. Critic L. A. Warren, a contemporary of Valle-Inclán writing in 1929, comments on Valle-Inclán's place in literature: "Valle-Inclán comes after Ruben Dario as the leading modernistic writer. He is the most important man of letters



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Valle-Inclán's *esperpentos* have been called precursors to the Theater of the Absurd—a designation pertaining to the work of particular European playwrights of the 1950s and 1960s. Some of the absurdist works influenced by Valle-Inclán include:

*Waiting for Godot* (1953), a play by Samuel Beckett.

Perhaps the seminal, if not most well-known absurdist work, this play revolves around the cast of characters waiting for the appearance of a central figure who fails to materialize by play's end.

*Rhinoceros* (1959), a play by Eugene Ionesco. Set in a small French town in which every resident but the main character turns into a rhinoceros, this play is a meditation on conformity and the herd mentality.

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966), a play by Tom Stoppard. This absurdist tragicomedy follows the exploits of two minor characters from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

in Spain today and is equal in aesthetic merit and interest to Gabriel d'Annunzio." Reaction to Valle-Inclán's later writing was also mixed. Some scholars objected to the grotesqueness of his *esperpentos* and the severity of the political satire in his later writings; however, his contemporaries, such as the writer José Martínez Ruiz, the philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, admired Valle-Inclán for his adept, innovative style and unique use of language. Modern critics have followed these writers in appraising Valle-Inclán: Manuel Salas, for example, has called him "a musician with words, a sovereign artist, a master stylist."

*Lights of Bohemia*

In an edited volume of the work, *Ramón del Valle-Inclán, Luces de Bohemia*, its editor, A. Zamora Vicente, expresses the view that one of the most outstanding characteristics of the play is its portrayal of society as a whole, which subsumes the plot and development of individual characters. Literary scholar A. R. Pastor characterizes the novel as "a powerful and dreamlike vision of the literary underworld of Madrid," and it seems clear that as recent translations make the work more accessible to an English-reading public, admiration for Valle-Inclán's writing and his "lonely place in the social literature of our time" will only continue to grow.

### Responses to Literature

1. In what ways does the term *esperpento* accurately describe Valle-Inclán's works? Cite specific examples from his work to support your response.
2. What social and political movements and sentiments are evident in Valle-Inclán's dramas?

3. What is the significance of the title *La Marquesa Rosalinda, farsa sentimental y grotesca*? Why do you think Valle-Inclán chose it?
4. Research the Generation of '98. Who were the other notable members of the group? What principles or common stylistic traits united them? What qualities, if any, did Valle-Inclán have that made him unique among the group?

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## Charles Dickens

BORN: 1812, Portsmouth, England

DIED: 1870, Kent, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Oliver Twist* (1837–1839)

*A Christmas Carol* (1843)

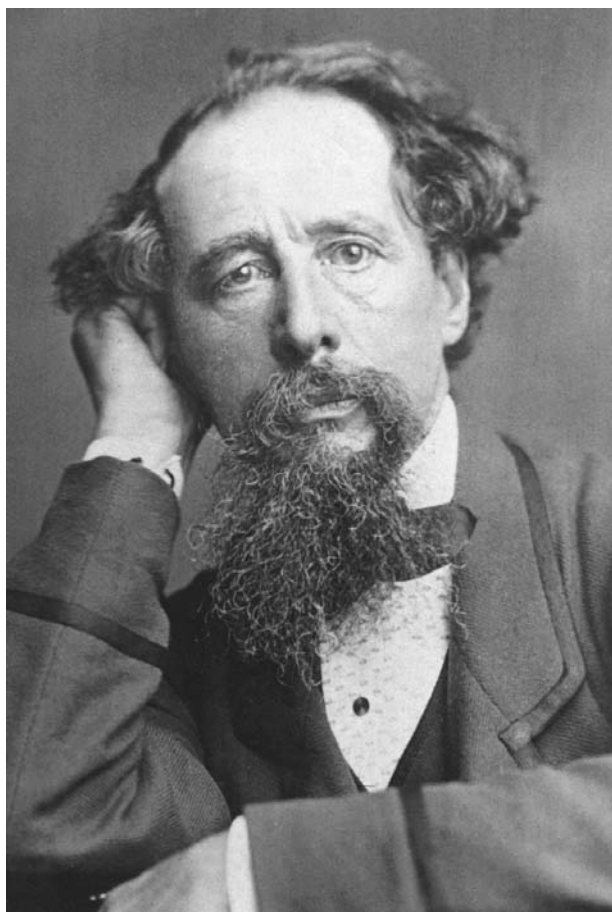
*Bleak House* (1852–1853)

*A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)

*Great Expectations* (1860–1861)

### Overview

Charles Dickens wrote fourteen full novels as well as sketches, travel, and Christmas books, and was at work on his fifteenth novel when he died. He took chances, dealt with social issues, and did not shy away from big ideas. Almost all of Dickens's novels display his comic



Charles Dickens General Photographic Agency / Hulton Archive / Getty Images

gift, his deep social concerns, and his talent for creating vivid characters. Many of his creations, most notably Ebenezer Scrooge, have become familiar English literary stereotypes, and today many of his novels are considered classics.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***Poverty and the Birth of Boz*** Charles Dickens was born on February 7, 1812, at Port-sea (later part of Portsmouth) on the southern coast of England. He was the son of a lower-middle-class father whose lack of financial foresight Dickens would later satirize in *David Copperfield*. Dickens's father constantly lived beyond his means and was eventually sent to debtor's prison, a jail specially reserved for people who could not pay back their debts. This deeply humiliated young Dickens, and even as an adult he was rarely able to speak of it. At the age of twelve he was forced to work in a factory for meager wages. Although the experience lasted only a few months, it left a permanent impression on Dickens.

Dickens returned to school after an inheritance relieved his father from debt, but he became an office boy at the age of fifteen. He learned shorthand and became a court reporter, which introduced him to journalism and aroused his contempt for politics. By 1832 he had become a reporter for two London newspapers and, in the following year, began to contribute a series of impressions and sketches to other newspapers and magazines, signing some of them "Boz." These scenes of London life helped establish Dickens's reputation and were published in 1836 as *Sketches by Boz*, his first book. On the strength of this success he married Catherine Hogarth. She eventually bore him ten children.

### Early Works

In 1836 Dickens began to publish *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* in monthly installments. *Pickwick* became one of the most popular works of the time. The comic heroes of the novel, the antiquarian members of the Pickwick Club, scour the English countryside for local points of interest and become involved in a variety of humorous adventures that reveal the characteristics of English social life. Later, however, the chairman of the club is involved in a lawsuit that lands him in debtors' prison. The lighthearted atmosphere of the novel changes, and the reader is given hints of the gloom and sympathy with which Dickens was to imbue his later works.

During the years of *Pickwick's* serialization, Dickens became editor of a new monthly, *Bentley's Miscellany*. When *Pickwick* was completed, he began publishing his new novel, *Oliver Twist* (1837–1839), in its pages—a practice he later continued. *Oliver Twist* traces the fortunes of an innocent orphan through the streets of London. It seems remarkable today that this novel's fairly frank treatment of criminals, prostitutes, and "fences" (receivers of stolen goods) could have been acceptable to the Victorian reading public. But so powerful was Dickens's portrayal of the "little boy lost" amid the low-life of the East End that the limits of his audience's tolerance were stretched.

Dickens was now firmly established in the most consistently successful career of any nineteenth-century author after the Scottish novelist and poet Sir Walter Scott. He could do no wrong as far as his readership was concerned, yet for the next decade his books would not achieve the standard of his early triumphs. These works include *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–1839), still cited for its exposé of brutality at an English boys' school; *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–1841), remembered for hitting a high (or low) point of sentimentality in its portrayal of the sufferings of Little Nell; and *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), still read as a historical novel, set as it is amid the anti-Catholic riots of 1780. Dickens wrote all these novels before he turned thirty, often working on two or three at a time.

In 1842 Dickens, who was as popular in America as he was in England, went on a five-month lecture tour of the United States, speaking out strongly for the abolition of slavery and other reforms. He returned to England deeply disappointed, dismayed by America's lack of support for an international copyright law, its acceptance of slavery, and what he saw as the general vulgarity of American people. On his return he wrote *American Notes*, which sharply criticized the cultural backwardness and aggressive materialism of American life. In his next novel, *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–1844), the hero retreats from the difficulties of making his way in England, only to find that survival is even harder on the American frontier. During the years in which *Chuzzlewit* appeared, Dickens also published two Christmas stories, *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and *The Chimes* (1844), which became as much a part of the Christmas season as the traditional English plum pudding.

### First Major Novels

After a year in Italy, Dickens wrote *Pictures from Italy* (1846). After its publication, he began writing his next novel, *Dombey and Son*, which continued until 1848. This novel established a new standard in the Dickensian tradition and may be said to mark the turning point in his career. As its full title indicates, *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son*, the novel is a study of the influence of the values of a business society on the personal fortunes of the members of the Dombey family and those with whom they come in contact. It takes a somber view of England at midcentury, and its mournful tone becomes characteristic of Dickens's novels for the rest of his life.

Dickens's next novel, *David Copperfield* (1849–1850), combined broad social perspective with an effort to take stock of himself at the midpoint of his literary career. This autobiographical novel fictionalized elements of Dickens's childhood degradation, pursuit of a journalistic and literary vocation, and love life. It shows the first comprehensive record of the typical course of a young man's life in Victorian England.

In 1850 Dickens began to edit a new periodical, *Household Words*. His editorials and articles for this magazine cover the entire span of English politics, social institutions, and family life. The weekly magazine was a great success and ran to 1859, when Dickens began to conduct a new weekly, *All the Year Round*. He published some of his major novels in both these periodicals.

### “Dark” Novels

In 1851 Dickens was stricken by the death of his father and one of his daughters within two weeks. Partly in response to these losses, he embarked on a series of works that have come to be called his “dark” novels. The first of these, *Bleak House* (1852–1853), has perhaps the most complicated plot of any English novel, but the narrative twists create a sense of the interrelationship of all seg-

ments of English society. The novel offers a humbling lesson about social snobbery and personal selfishness.

Dickens's next novel is even more didactic in its criticism of selfishness. *Hard Times* (1854) was written specifically to challenge the common view that practicality and facts were of greater importance and value than feelings and persons. In his indignation at callousness in business and public educational systems, Dickens laid part of the charge for the heartlessness of Englishmen at the door of the utilitarian philosophy then much in vogue. This philosophy held that the moral worth of an action is defined by how it contributes to overall usefulness. But the lasting applicability of the novel lies in its intensely focused picture of an English industrial town in the heyday of capitalist expansion and in its keen view of the limitations of both employers and reformers.

The somber tone of *Bleak House* and *Hard Times* reflected the harsh social reality of an England infatuated with industrial progress at any price. Ironically, many of the societal ills that Dickens wrote about in such novels had already been righted by the time of their publication.

Some claim *Little Dorrit* (1855–1857) is Dickens's greatest novel. In it he provides the same range of social observation he had developed in previous major works, but he creates two striking symbols as well. Dickens sums up the condition of England both specifically in the symbol of the debtors' prison, in which the heroine's father is entombed, and also generally in the many forms of personal servitude and confinement that are exhibited in the course of the plot. Second, Dickens raises to symbolic stature the child as innocent sufferer of the world's abuses. By making his heroine not a child but a childlike figure of Christian loving kindness, Dickens poses the central question of his work—the conflict between the world's harshness and human values.

The year 1857 saw the beginnings of a personal crisis for Dickens when he fell in love with an actress named Ellen Ternan. He separated from his wife the following year, after many years of marital incompatibility. In this period Dickens also began to give much of his time and energy to public readings from his novels, which became even more popular than his lectures on topical questions.

### Later Works

In 1859 Dickens published *A Tale of Two Cities*, a historical novel of the French Revolution. While below the standard of the long and comprehensive “dark” novels, it evokes the historical period and tells of a surprisingly modern hero's self-sacrifice. Besides publishing this novel in the newly founded *All the Year Round*, Dickens also published seventeen articles, which appeared in 1860 as the book *The Uncommercial Traveller*.

Dickens's next novel, *Great Expectations* (1860–1861), tells the story of a young man's moral development in the course of his life—from childhood in the provinces to gentleman's status in London. Not an



autobiographical novel like *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations* belongs to the type of fiction called, in German, *Bildungsroman* (the novel of someone's education or formation by experience).

The next work in the Dickens canon took an unusual three years to write, but in 1864–1865 Dickens published *Our Mutual Friend*. In it, the novelist thoroughly and devastatingly presents the vision of English society in all its classes and institutions.

In the closing years of his life, Dickens worsened his declining health by giving numerous readings. He never fully recovered from an 1865 railroad accident, but insisted on traveling throughout the British Isles and America to read before wildly enthusiastic audiences. He broke down in 1869 and gave a final series of readings in London in the following year. He also began *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* but died in 1870, leaving it unfinished. His burial in Westminster Abbey was an occasion of national mourning. His tombstone reads: "He was a sympathiser with the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed; and by his death, one of England's greatest writers is lost to the world."

### Works in Literary Context

Charles Dickens's death on June 9, 1870, reverberated across the Atlantic, causing the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to say that he had never known "an author's death to cause such general mourning." English novelist Thomas Carlyle wrote: "It is an event world-wide, a *unique* of talents suddenly extinct." And the day after his death, the newspaper Dickens once edited, the London *Daily News*, reported that Dickens had been "emphatically the novelist of his age. In his pictures of contemporary life posterity will read, more clearly than in contemporary records, the character of nineteenth century life."

***Oliver Twist*** With *Oliver Twist*, Dickens chose to write a kind of novel that was already highly popular, the so-called Newgate novel, named after London's well-known Newgate prison. Two previous stories of crime and punishment had been Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Paul Clifford* (1830) and Harrison Ainsworth's *Rookwood* (1834). Inevitably, Dickens did lose some readers who found the criminal aspect to be "painful and revolting," as one said. A different kind of reader was put off by the prominence of the social criticism in the opening chapters, in which Dickens exposes the cruel inadequacies of workhouse life as organized by the New Poor Law of 1834. The law made the workhouses, where people who could not support themselves were forced to live and work, essentially prisons with degrading conditions, and mandated the separation of families upon entering.

***Bleak House*** This work boils with discontents sometimes expressed in fiery abuse, discontents that are also prominent in other Dickens novels of the 1850s and 1860s. What is strange about the chronology is that the

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Dickens's famous contemporaries include:

**Florence Nightingale** (1820–1910): Born in Italy, this Englishwoman was a nursing pioneer who headed a volunteer nursing staff during the Crimean War and worked for more sanitary living conditions. She was awarded the Order of Merit in 1907.

**Mark Twain** (1835–1910): American writer, humorist, and satirist.

**Louis Daguerre** (1787–1851): French artist who invented an early form of photography, the *daguerrotype*.

**Honoré de Balzac** (1799–1850): French novelist and playwright. He is regarded as one of the founders of the realist school of literature.

**Leo Tolstoy** (1828–1910): Russian novelist and philosopher. He is one of the masters of realist fiction.

**Otto von Bismarck** (1815–1898): Prime minister of Prussia and later chancellor of the German empire. As chancellor, von Bismarck promoted anti-Catholic and anti-Polish sentiment but also pushed through a federal old-age pension and an accident insurance plan.

1850s and 1860s, economically and in other areas, were not a dark period, but rather decades when the English seemed at last to have solved some of the big problems that had looked to be insoluble in the 1830s and 1840s.

### Works in Critical Context

Dickens preferred to write as an angry outsider, critical of the shortcomings of mid-Victorian values. Predictably, his "dark period" novels cost him some readers who felt that the attacks on institutions were misguided, unfair, and finally, tiresome. Obviously, not all of Dickens's contemporaries felt the same, for among the reading public, from *Bleak House* onward, his novels fared well, as they have continued to do. In fact, these are the novels that have been chiefly responsible for the remarkable "Dickens boom," as author Hillis Miller called it, of the 1960s and after.

### *Oliver Twist*

The English critic and writer Angus Wilson noted that "perhaps more than any other," *Oliver Twist* "has a combination of sensationalism and sentiment that fixes it as one of the masterpieces of pop art." Critics of the day, such as that at the *Quarterly Review*, were quick to point out that Dickens dealt in hyperbole: "*Oliver Twist* is directed against the poor-law and workhouse system, and in our opinion with much unfairness. The abuses which [Dickens] ridicules are not only exaggerated, but

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Themes of social injustice usually result from the author's own experiences or observations and most often reflect the author's dissatisfaction with the way a certain class or group is treated. Here are some works that deal with issues of social injustice.

*Nickel and Dime* (2001), a nonfiction book by Barbara Ehrenreich. This memoir provides an account of the author's attempt to live off minimum-wage earnings in various U.S. states in 1998.

*The Kingdom of God Is Within You* (1894), a nonfiction work by Leo Tolstoy. This work by the Russian novelist argues that nonviolence is the only answer to oppression. It was a major influence on the thinking of Indian activist Mohandas Gandhi.

*To Sir, with Love* (1959), a novel by E. R. Braithwaite. This semiautobiographical novel tells of a black teacher from Guyana and his working-class white students in a poor neighborhood of London.

*Black Beauty* (1877), a novel by Anna Sewell. This novel exposes the hardship and mistreatment during the life of a horse in Victorian England.

*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), by J. K. Rowling. In the fourth installment in the Harry Potter series, Hermione Granger takes up the cause of rights for the oppressed house-elves, forming the Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare, to the dismay of her friends.

in nineteen cases out of twenty do not exist at all." Jack Lindsay in *Charles Dickens: A Biographical and Critical Study* wrote that "the last word . . . must be given to Dickens's power to draw characters in a method of intense poetic simplification, which makes them simultaneously social emblems, emotional symbols, and visually precise individuals." The book is also one of the more enduring classics of the Dickens canon, immortalized both by its 1948 film adaptation and the 1968 musical comedy *Oliver!*.

### ***Great Expectations***

Many Victorian readers welcomed this novel for its humor after the "dark period" novels. But most critical discussions since 1950 argue that the Victorians were misled by some of its great comic scenes and also by Pip's career. Unlike the Victorians, modern critics see *Great Expectations* as a brilliant study of guilt, another very sad book—another "dark period" novel, that is. Dickens, author Philip Hobsbaum noted, "warns us to put no trust in the surface of illusions or class and caste. Our basic personality is shaped in youth and can never change. . . . Every hope of altering his condition that Pip, the central character, ever entertained is smashed over his head."

## Responses to Literature

1. The idea of childhood as a formative period is relatively modern. In the Victorian era and before, children were thought of as mini versions of adults and were expected to behave as such. Do you think that the relative freedom you have as a teenager helps you develop your strengths and sense of self, or does it encourage irresponsible behavior?
2. Using the Internet and library sources, research utilitarianism. On what basis do you think actions should be judged? Is the good of society more important than the happiness of specific individuals?
3. Dickens was deeply ashamed of his father's time in debtor's prison, but transformed it through his art. Using your library's resources and the Internet, research the concept of "psychological resilience," the ability to recover from difficult experiences. Write an essay outlining how a person can become more resilient, using specific examples of situations that you may have experienced yourself.
4. The Victorians believed that owing money and being unable to pay it was a moral failing. Research the current mortgage crisis in the United States, and write an essay examining modern-day attitudes toward owing money. Is owing money still seen as a moral issue, or just bad luck? Where do you think personal responsibility lies?
5. Nike was one of several companies whose manufacturers were exposed as using child labor in 2001. Nike has since changed their labor practices. Research what changes they have made, and write an essay analyzing whether they have done enough to ensure that their products do not result from exploitative labor practices. Where should a company's standards lie—with the countries that produce its products, which might have laxer regulations, or with the country it is based in, which might result in more expensive products?

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## Isak Dinesen

BORN: 1885, Rungsted, Denmark

DIED: 1962, Rungsted, Denmark

NATIONALITY: Danish

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Seven Gothic Tales* (1934)

*Out of Africa* (1937)

*Winter's Tales* (1942)

*Babette's Feast* (1950)

### Overview

Isak Dinesen is best known for *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934) and the autobiographical novel *Out of Africa* (1937). Acclaimed for her poetic prose style, complex characters, and intricate plots, Dinesen was concerned with such themes as the lives and values of aristocrats, the nature of fate and destiny, God and the supernatural, the artist, and the place of women in society. Hailed as a protofeminist by some critics, scorned as a colonialist by others, Dinesen is chiefly regarded as a masterly storyteller. Ernest Hemingway once remarked that the Nobel Prize in Literature he received in 1954 should have been awarded to her.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Early Tragedy** Born Karen Christenze Dinesen on April 17, 1885, in Rungsted, Denmark, Dinesen led a happy childhood until tragedy shattered her comfortable existence. In 1895 her father, Wilhelm, hung himself. Dinesen had always been very close to her father, and his suicide was a shock. Dinesen later reflected: "It was as if a part of oneself had also died." Dinesen's brother



Isak Dinesen Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Thomas, with whom she remained close as an adult, later speculated that their father had suffered from syphilis, a disease that Dinesen herself would contract years later.

**Literature for Fun** Tutored at home by a series of governesses, Dinesen showed early artistic promise and as a teenager studied drawing, painting, and languages at a private school in France. In 1903 she was admitted into the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. There she developed her affinity for painting, an interest that would later be reflected in the rich descriptive style of her writing. Dinesen dropped out of the academy after several year's study and soon thereafter took up writing. Mario Krohn, an art historian Dinesen had met at the academy, read her work and encouraged her to take writing seriously. Krohn also arranged to have some of her stories read by Valdemar Vedel, editor of one of Denmark's most distinguished literary magazines, *Tilskueren*.

During these years Dinesen spent much of her time in the company of her upper-class relatives and soon found herself deeply but unhappily involved with her second cousin, Hans Blixen-Finecke. The failed love affair had a great impact on Dinesen. Extremely depressed, she left Denmark in 1910 to attend a new art school in Paris. When Mario Krohn visited Dinesen in Paris and asked her about her literary ambitions she answered that she wanted "all things in life more than to be a writer—travel, dancing,

living, the freedom to paint.” When she returned to her family estate at Rungstedlund several months later, Dinesen turned to writing as a pleasant diversion.

When Blixen-Finecke abandoned her for a fiancée eight years younger, Dinesen decided to marry Hans’s twin brother, Bror. Bror is said to have been competitive, the kind of man who would enjoy winning his brother’s sweetheart. This rash determination to reach the object of her desire through a substitute would later be represented allegorically in many of Dinesen’s stories, which deal with the theme of vicarious achievement.

**Africa and Syphilis** With the encouragement of relatives, Dinesen and Bror embarked on a grand plan to start a pioneer coffee farm in East Africa. Little is known about their courtship, except that Bror later gave Dinesen credit for the idea of going to Africa. They were married in 1914 in Mombasa, on the coast of British East Africa. They set up housekeeping on seven hundred acres of woodland, twelve miles southwest of Nairobi. The farm lay at an elevation of sixty-two hundred feet, near the Ngong Hills, a range of low mountains forming a barrier against the Rift Valley. Only a year after her marriage, sometime in the early months of 1915, Dinesen learned she had contracted syphilis, a venereal disease. Later she told her family that her husband had given her the illness; he had evidently been unfaithful to her. The couple separated for a time after this incident.

Her letters suggest that she made a suicide attempt in February of that year. Several weeks later she turned up in Paris, looking for a specialist in venereal diseases. She eventually made her way through war-torn Europe back to Denmark, where a venereologist found her to be suffering from syphilis and poisoning from the treatment (mercury tablets, an earlier form of syphilis treatment) given to her in Nairobi. Through a series of injections of intravenous arsenic Dinesen grew better. Reexaminations in 1919 and 1925 revealed no further evidence of syphilis; however, despite the doctor’s assurances, Dinesen continued to believe she would never recover from the illness. Syphilis appears time and again in Dinesen’s writings and features prominently in the popular myth that gathered around her after she rose to literary prominence. She could not escape the irony that she had been victimized by the same illness that had led to her father’s suicide. She spent much of her later life developing a philosophy to cope with the implications of the diagnosis. In 1926 she wrote to her brother Thomas: “If it did not sound so beastly I might say that, the world being as it is, it was worth having syphilis in order to become a Baroness.” Dinesen was later proved right: her disease flared up again later in her life.

After spending most of 1915 and 1916 in Denmark, Dinesen reconciled with her husband. They returned to their African farm with a new bankroll provided by her relatives. A series of droughts precluded any profits from the large capital input. Bror was frequently absent from

home, chasing other investments. Toward the end of 1918 Dinesen found consolation in a new friendship, with Denys Finch Hatton, an Englishman recently returned from World War I. Shortly after the war ended, Dinesen separated permanently from Bror (they divorced in 1925). The immediate cause was not Finch Hatton, but Bror’s continuing infidelities. After Bror left, she protected herself from loneliness by writing stories. Several notebooks filled with outlines and jottings survive from her years in Africa; many of these stories were later revised and published in *Seven Gothic Tales*.

In 1924 Finch Hatton began staying in her house while working in Nairobi—a few months out of every year. She miscarried his child in 1922 and another in 1926. He was not interested in marriage. In 1928 he entertained his friend, Edward, Prince of Wales (later King Edward V until he abdicated and became Duke of Windsor) at her house—an event described in *Out of Africa*. He also bought an airplane and flew Dinesen over her farm, which she describes as her “most transporting pleasure” in Africa.

By 1929 a cascade of events had begun that would bring an end to Dinesen’s farming life. A loan promised by Finch Hatton never materialized. The collapse of major stock markets sent coffee and land prices spiraling downward. Locusts descended on the land, and drought exhausted Dinesen’s last hopes for recovery. Finally, she had to sell the farm to a developer in Nairobi. A few weeks later, on May 14, 1931, Finch Hatton died in an airplane crash. Dinesen looked on Africa for the last time that month and returned to her homeland for good.

**Literature for Profit** Once home at Rungstedlund, Dinesen began to write almost immediately, working in her father’s old office. Now, however, her motives were serious. “I could not see any kind of future before me. And I had no money; my dowry, so to say, had gone with the farm. I owed it to the people on whom I was dependent to try to make some kind of existence for myself. Those Gothic Tales began to demand to be written,” she later wrote in *Daguerreotypes, and Other Essays*. Two years later, at age forty-eight, Dinesen completed her first collection of stories, *Seven Gothic Tales*.

Although *Seven Gothic Tales* was written in English, Dinesen experienced some difficulty getting the book into print; few publishers were willing to bet on a debut work by an unknown Danish author. Several British publishers rejected the manuscript before it came across the desk of Dorothy Canfield Fisher, a friend of Thomas Dinesen and member of the Book-of-the-Month Club selection committee. Impressed with the collection, Fisher sent it to publisher Robert Haas, who was equally impressed and released *Seven Gothic Tales* the following year.

An aura of mystery surrounded the book’s publication. When it offered *Seven Gothic Tales* as its April 1934 selection, the Book-of-the-Month Club newsletter stated simply, “No clue is available as to the pseudonymic

author.” Dinesen herself confused matters by preceding her maiden name with a man’s first name—Isak, Hebrew for “one who laughs.” Her true identity was not revealed until over fifty thousand copies of *Seven Gothic Tales* were in print. With this collection Dinesen began a long and rewarding relationship with American readers, as five of her books became Book-of-the-Month Club selections.

In spite of poor health and repeated hospitalizations, Dinesen continued to work on a book of memoirs titled *Out of Africa*. Considered by many to be the greatest pastoral romance of the twentieth century, *Out of Africa* enjoyed immediate and lasting critical acclaim, particularly from British and American critics. The book became a hit movie in 1985 and won seven Academy Awards.

**Winter’s Tales and Last Tales** In 1940 Dinesen was commissioned by the Copenhagen daily newspaper *Politiken* to spend a month in Berlin, a month in Paris, and a month in London and to write a series of articles about each city. Although the advent of World War II caused the cancellations of the Paris and London visits, Dinesen’s recollections of Hitler’s Germany were later compiled in the posthumous collection *Daguerreotypes, and Other Essays*. About this time Dinesen also began work on her second set of stories, although completion of the volume was delayed by complications arising from tertiary syphilis, a late stage of the disease. Dinesen eventually finished this second collection, and, in 1942, *Winter’s Tales*, a book that derives its title from one of Shakespeare’s plays, was published in the United States, England, and Denmark.

*Winter’s Tales*, along with *Seven Gothic Tales* and *Out of Africa*, are generally considered to be Dinesen’s masterpieces. Between their publication and the 1957 publication of *Last Tales*, there was a fifteen-year hiatus during which she published only one book: *The Angelic Avengers*, a thriller novel released in 1946 under the pseudonym of Pierre Andrezel. Dinesen was never proud of *The Angelic Avengers* and for many years refused to acknowledge herself as the book’s author. Even after such acknowledgment, Dinesen criticized the book, claiming that she wrote it solely for her own amusement as a diversion from the grim realities of Nazi-occupied Denmark.

Although she suffered from chronic spinal syphilis and emaciation, Dinesen continued to lecture and give interviews. She became a founding member of the Danish Academy in 1960 and died in Rungsted in 1962.

## Works in Literary Context

**Gothic Decadence** In *Seven Gothic Tales* Dinesen introduced stylistic and thematic motifs that are to be found throughout much of her subsequent work. She derived these motifs largely from two nineteenth-century literary movements—the Gothic and the Decadent. As in the novels written in these genres, Dinesen’s tales are

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Dinesen’s famous contemporaries include:

**Howard Hughes** (1905–1976): One of the world’s richest men, Hughes initially became famous for his work as an aviator and film producer, as well as his glamorous playboy lifestyle, but went on to become an infamous recluse and eccentric, eventually cutting himself off from the outside world altogether.

**Franklin D. Roosevelt** (1882–1945): The thirty-second president of the United States, Franklin Roosevelt was elected to four terms, serving from 1933 to 1945. His presidency spanned two of America’s darkest hours, the Great Depression and World War II, and his policies and leadership are widely credited by historians with successfully steering the country through both events.

**Wallis Simpson** (1895–1986): An American socialite, Simpson was divorced from one husband and in the process of divorcing another when she began a relationship in 1934 with Edward, Prince of Wales, causing a scandal. By 1936, with Edward crowned king of England, his plans to marry Simpson led to a constitutional crisis, and Edward abdicated rather than end his relationship. After Edward’s abdication, Simpson continued to stir controversy thanks to rumors that she was a Nazi sympathizer.

**J. R. R. Tolkien** (1892–1973): An Oxford professor and academic specializing in Anglo-Saxon studies, Tolkien was also interested in mythology and fantasy. To this end he began imagining a mythical world incorporating elements of ancient Saxon folklore and his own invented languages. The resulting works, notably *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, were directly responsible for popularizing high fantasy as a literary genre.

often characterized by an emphasis on the emotional and spiritual, a nostalgia for the glory of past ages, a predilection for exotic characters, and an overriding sense of mystery, horror, and the supernatural. Eric O. Johansson noted in *The World of Isak Dinesen* that “the spinechilling tale of terror, with its persecuted women, its ghosts, and its mysterious convents and castles, as well as the cruel tale, with its atmosphere of perversity and artificiality, have served as sources of inspiration for Dinesen.”

**Interdependence** *Seven Gothic Tales* also introduces Dinesen’s preoccupation with the principle of interdependence, which she further develops in later works. In *Seven Gothic Tales* there are interrelationships among individual stories in the volume as well as the existence of stories within stories. Comparing such constructions to



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Other works that examine the theme of destiny, and characters' struggles against it, include:

*The Golden Compass* (1995), a novel by Philip Pullman.

The first book in the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, this work of fantasy examines destiny, and the struggle to eliminate it in favor of free will, as a central theme.

*Silas Marner* (1861), a novel by George Eliot. A

central theme of this tale of love and redemption is the just reward and punishment of characters according to their place in a strictly delineated moralistic order.

*Oedipus the King* (429 BCE), a play by Sophocles. Perhaps

the archetypal tale of a character attempting to alter his destiny—and in so doing fulfilling his preordained fate—this classic Greek drama tells the story of a man prophesied to murder his father and marry his mother, which is exactly what he ends up doing without realizing it.

“a complex kaleidoscope,” Elizabeth Ely Fuller wrote in the *New Boston Review* that “each character and each event works as a little bit of mirror reflecting another character or event, and then turning slightly to catch some other reflection. To reinforce this overall plot structure, Dinesen uses mirror images and similes repeatedly as the characters muse on their own nature and on their relation to others. To any one of them, the story makes no sense, but taken as a whole, the stories, like a piece of music or a minuet, form a complete pattern of movement.” The principle of interdependence works on a thematic level in *Seven Gothic Tales* as well, as such disparate concepts as good and evil, comedy and tragedy, and art and life are intricately linked.

**Destiny** Destiny, more specifically one's control over it, is one of Dinesen's major themes. In her view, such a coming to terms involves an acceptance of one's fate as determined by God. “Dinesen's tales, like the stories in the *Arabian Nights*, proclaim the belief in the all but magic power of the story to provide man with a new vision and a renewed faith in life,” Johannesson wrote. “Her figures are often Hamlet figures, melancholy men and women who wait for fate to lend them a helping hand, who wait for the storyteller to provide them with a destiny by placing them in a story.”

### Works in Critical Context

Dinesen's writings have been widely praised and enthusiastically received. Critics applaud her prose style, her facility with complicated plots and characters, and her

“natural” gift for storytelling. While many scholars have claimed that her picture of Africa in *Out of Africa* is romanticized, they note that the story is engaging and well-structured, and presents a detailed picture of life among British expatriates.

**Out of Africa** In a *Chicago Tribune* review, Richard Stern called the work “perhaps the finest book ever written about Africa,” claiming that “it casts over landscape, animals, and people the kind of transfixing spell [James Joyce's] ‘Ulysses’ casts over Dublin.” Katherine Woods, writing in the *New York Times*, praised the book's absence of “sentimentality” and “elaboration” and averred, “Like the Ngong hills—which are amongst the most beautiful in the world”—this writing is without redundancies, bared to its lines of strength and beauty.” Even those critics who found fault with the book's structure commended Dinesen's style. “The tale of increasing tragedy which fills the latter half of the book seems not quite so successful as her earlier chapters,” noted Hassoldt Davis in the *Saturday Review of Literature*. “But,” he added, “her book has a solid core of beauty in it, and a style as cadenced, constrained, and graceful as we have today.” Hudson Strode seemed to capture the sentiments of many critics when he wrote in *Books*: “The author casts enchantment over her landscape with the most casual phrases. . . . Backward, forward, she goes, a spark here, a flare there, until she has the landscape fairly lit up before you with all its inhabitants and customs in place. The result is a great naturalness.”

**Winter's Tales** With *Winter's Tales* Dinesen broke from the relative realism of *Out of Africa* and returned to the highly imaginative style that characterizes *Seven Gothic Tales*. “Suffused with vague aspirations toward some cloudy ideal,” noted Clifton Fadiman in the *New Yorker*, “with a longing for the impossible, with a brooding delight in magnificent and absurd gestures, with a quality of sleepwalking, they are as far removed from 1943 as anything can well be.” Some critics, however, found fault with Dinesen's unique writing style: In a *Commonweal* review J. E. Tobin claimed, “The characters lack even the vague shape of ghosts; the atmosphere is that of stale perfume; the writing, called quaint by some, is downright awkward.” The general consensus, however, was one of commendation for both the form and content of *Winter's Tales*. Struthers Brut, writing in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, summed up such a reaction when he maintained: “Often as you read the tales you wonder why you are so interested, so constantly excited, for the tales themselves, all of them symbolic, are not especially exciting in their plots, and the characters are frequently as remote as those in fairy tales, and a great deal of the time you are wandering in a fourth dimension where nothing is clear. But the final effect is unforgettable, just as the moments of reading are unforgettable.”

## Responses to Literature

1. Dinesen's novella *Babette's Feast* became an award-winning film in 1986. Read the book and watch the film. The feast Babette creates is, indeed, spectacular. What does the feast mean for the various characters? What is different after the feast? Do you think all the effort that went into it was worthwhile?
2. What are Dinesen's views of love and marriage? Based on these, would you consider Dinesen a feminist?
3. Dinesen is often accused of classism. How does she represent both aristocrats and the lower classes in her novels and stories? For example, what is Dinesen's attitude toward her Kenyan servants and workers in *Out of Africa*? How does race influence her concept of class?
4. Discuss the theme of destiny in Dinesen's fiction and nonfiction. Can you relate her concept of destiny to a modern work of art with a similar theme?

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## ■ Charles Lutwidge Dodgson

SEE *Lewis Carroll*

## ▣ John Donne

BORN: 1572, London, England

DIED: 1631, London, England

NATIONALITY: British, English

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

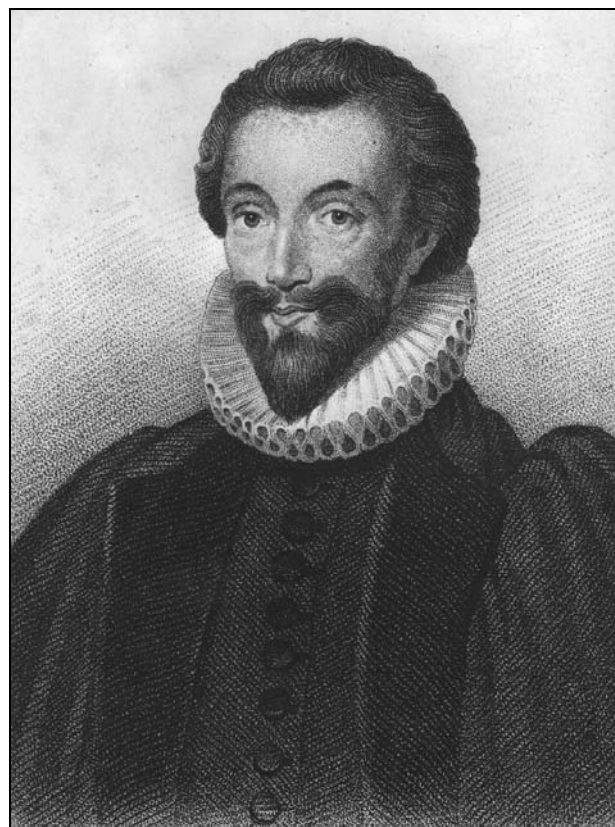
MAJOR WORKS:

*Holy Sonnets* (1609–1610)

"A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" (1611)

*Deaths Duell* (1631)

*Essays in Divinity* (1651)



John Donne Hulton Archive / Getty Images

### Overview

An accomplished master of both prose and poetry, John Donne was a controversial seventeenth-century English poet whose life and work are often perceived as a study in contrasts. His secular verses portray him as a man who celebrates the joys of physical union. His poems of divinity, however, reveal him to be a serious Christian humanist who contemplated mortality and humanity's submissiveness to God's will. Donne led the Metaphysical poetry movement and was a major influence on modernist writers of the first half of the twentieth century.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**A Catholic Upbringing** John Donne was born in 1572 in London, England, into a devout Roman Catholic family. His father was a prosperous London merchant, and his mother was a relative of Catholic martyr Sir Thomas More. Donne was educated at home by Catholic tutors until age eleven, when he went to Hart Hall, Oxford. Donne attended Oxford University but he did not take a degree. Graduation required signing an oath of allegiance to the English monarch, which would have compromised his Catholic beliefs requiring him to swear

allegiance only to the pope. He entered law school at Lincoln's Inn in 1592.

Donne was born during the reign of Elizabeth I, an era now recognized as one of the most bountiful periods of art and literature in the history of England. The Elizabethan era was characterized by exploration in foreign lands and expansion of the British Empire, relative peace between Protestants and Catholics (though she decreed that all citizens were required to attend a Church of England Sunday service), and a flowering of English poetry and theater. Some writers who lived during this time were William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, John Milton, and Edmund Spenser.

Donne may not have been the first to imitate classical satire, but his pieces constitute the finest from the outpouring of satiric verse in the 1590s. Behind his satire lies a contempt for the shallowness and hypocrisy of contemporary life, particularly life at court. In "Satyre 3," having observed the activities and goals of his countrymen, Donne concludes that his compatriots, content with false achievement, have the "courage of straw." Nowhere in society does he find dedication to what he considers life's only meaningful quest: the quest for religious truth. This search took on new meaning for Donne when, in 1593, his youngest brother died in prison after being arrested for harboring a Catholic priest. It was around this time that Donne renounced his Catholic faith.

**Sonnets and Sails** It was also in the 1590s that Donne wrote many of his love poems, most of which are dramatic monologues. In these poems, Donne explores different conceptions of love, ranging from cynical realism to platonic idealism and presents the extremes of both physical and spiritual love in a favorable light. During these years, Donne also composed letters, elegies, wedding songs, and epigrams that were published after his death as *Songs and Sonets* (1635).

Donne volunteered to sail with the Earl of Essex to sack Cadiz in 1596 and with Sir Walter Raleigh to hunt Spanish treasure ships in the Azores in 1597. Donne celebrated these experiences in the poems "The Storm" and "The Calm." One of his companions on these voyages was the son of Sir Thomas Egerton, a judge and adviser to Queen Elizabeth. The young Egerton helped Donne gain employment as his father's secretary.

**Marriage and Jail** In December 1601, when he was nearly thirty, Donne eloped with Anne More, Egerton's seventeen-year-old niece. He severely underestimated the reaction and influence of his wife's father, Sir George More, who was a member of Parliament and a favorite of the queen. More was enraged not only because Donne had obtained his daughter in an underhanded way, but also because Donne had an unsavory reputation, and his family was identified with the Catholic underground. More had Donne thrown into jail, and he destroyed Donne's career by forcing Egerton to dismiss him. Released from prison in 1602, Donne had little chance

of obtaining gainful employment. He spent the next thirteen years in poverty, desperately seeking patronage to support his wife and rapidly growing family. (Anne Donne died while giving birth to the couple's twelfth child in 1617.)

**The Church of England** After embracing the Church of England—the only church officially recognized by King James I and his wealthy supporters—Donne gained the patronage of Sir Thomas Morton, a prominent member of the Protestant clergy, who hired him to write anti-Catholic pamphlets. *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610), Donne's first published guide, was written to persuade English Catholics to renounce their allegiance to Rome and instead take the oath of allegiance to the British crown. This work captured the attention of King James I. The anti-Jesuit polemic *Ignatius His Conclave* followed in 1611. Donne then wrote *Biathanatos*, a treatise defending suicide, for which Donne admitted a "sickley inclination." (The subject matter of this poem made it unsuitable for publication at the time; it was not published until 1646.)

**The Anniversaries** "An Anatomie of the World" and "Of the Progres of the Soule," together known as the *Anniversaries* (1611), were poems composed for Sir Robert Drury on the first two anniversaries of his fifteen-year-old daughter's death. These poems earned Donne the patronage of Drury, who took the poet to France in 1611 on a diplomatic mission. It was during this time in France that Donne, missing Anne, wrote "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" (1611).

**The Priesthood** Upon his return to England, Donne was increasingly pressured by King James to become a priest in the Church of England. Despite his reluctance, the former Catholic was ordained an Anglican priest in 1615. For some time, he wrote no poetry but focused on his new duties, writing and delivering sermons in a style that impressed many members of the royal court. Donne's mastery of prose is directly linked to his evolution into a great preacher. His unique blend of verbal command, emotional and psychological insight, expansive knowledge, and imaginative range set him apart from his clerical peers. In 1621 he was appointed dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, where he soon began attracting large crowds with his brilliant oratory.

When he suffered an attack of spotted fever in 1623, Donne believed that he was dying. This attack prompted him to write *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, and Severall Steps in My Sickness*, a collection of somber meditations that includes the prose work "No Man Is an Island" and the poems "Hymn to God the Father" and "Hymn to God My God, in My Sickness." Despite his fears, Donne escaped death on this occasion, but such would not be the case a few years later. During Lent in 1631, Donne delivered his last sermon, "Deaths Duell." He died on March 31, 1631.



## Works in Literary Context

**Metaphysical Poetry** Reacting against the traditions of Elizabethan love poetry, Donne and other Metaphysical poets shunned classical or romantic allusions, attempting instead to portray the complexities and uncertainties of everyday life. Metaphysical poetry is characterized by complex, witty, and far-fetched sudden—even jarring—paradoxes and contrasts; strong imagery that combines the ornate with the mundane; and contemplations of the natural world’s unity with the divine. A metaphysical conceit is an extended metaphor or simile in which the poet draws an ingenious comparison between two very unlike objects.

Peggy Nightingale found “A Valediction” to be a good example of the elements found in Donne’s style: “An expression of intense feeling carried by a series of clever and witty comparisons; the speaking voice of the poem addresses an imagined listener directly; and generally that voice employs a fairly natural syntax, frequently settling for half-rhymes.” “A Valediction” ends with one of Donne’s most famous Metaphysical conceits: The lover compares their souls to the feet of a drawing compass, parting and then coming together again.

“Holy Sonnet 14” is also characteristic of metaphysical poetry, showing wit, energy, and psychological drama. However, this sonnet in particular goes beyond those qualities in its outrageous daring. “Holy Sonnet 14” addresses God in blatantly sexual terms—as the bridegroom of the soul. Highly dramatic, the poem begins with both an angry demand that God remake the speaker and a complaint that God has so far not been using all his force to eliminate the speaker’s sinfulness. Proclaiming deep love and desire for God, the speaker resorts to tenderness and pleading and confesses to being “betroted” to God’s enemy and, therefore, in need of rescue. The speaker then prays urgently for such release in clearly sexual terms, using sexual love as a metaphor for spiritual love amidst several paradoxes that shows the power of God, who resolves all paradoxes.

Donne apparently loved the intellectual challenges of paradox, one of the key characteristics of metaphysical poetry. He constructs “Holy Sonnet 10” around one of the central paradoxes of Christianity: that Christ’s sacrifice will ultimately mean the death of Death. Systematically, the poem instructs Death to give up its pride, since it will ultimately be defeated. Further, even though Death has power, its power is severely limited. Death unknowingly does God’s work, since only through Death can humanity achieve the eternal life God promises.

## Works in Critical Context

Once considered the story of an abrupt transformation from worldly audacity to Christian conformity, Donne’s life and career are today seen in terms of an artistically sensitive man’s spiritual growth in a lifelong search for meaning and wholeness. Undeniably, there was the younger Donne who wrote the lighthearted *Songs and*

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Donne’s famous contemporaries include:

**Ben Jonson** (1572–1637): English Renaissance playwright and poet, Jonson is known for his lyric poems and satirical plays.

**Queen Elizabeth I** (1533–1603): During her reign, the Queen reestablished Protestantism (the Church of England) as England’s official religion.

**Henry Hudson** (1560–1611): Hudson, an English explorer, discovered present-day Chesapeake Bay, Delaware Bay, and the Hudson River.

**William Laud** (1573–1645): Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, encouraged King Charles I to believe in a “divine right” to rule (which suggested the monarchy was accountable only to God, not to the people).

**Anne Hutchinson** (1591–1643): An English Puritan dissenter, Hutchinson immigrated to the New World, where she was one of the first settlers of Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

**Constantijn Huygens** (1596–1687): This Dutch poet and composer was one of the major intellectuals of the Dutch Golden Age.

*Sonets*, the Donne of middle years who wrote to please his patrons and gain favor with influential readers, and the older Donne concerned with the meaning of sanctity.

**Criticism Through the Years** The critical history of Donne’s works is, noted A. J. Smith, “the most remarkable of any major writer in English; no other body of great poetry has fallen so far from favor for so long and been generally condemned as inept and crude.” The first collection of Donne’s poetry was not published until two years after the author’s death. Entitled *Poems* (1633), this collection was prefaced with elegies by contemporaries of Donne, who represented one side of early criticism of Donne’s poetry—those who honored Donne as a master. Thomas Carew eloquently lamented the passing of “a King, that rul’d as hee thought fit / the universall Monarchy of wit.”

A different view was first voiced by Ben Jonson in his famous recorded conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden in 1618 or 1619. While praising Donne’s poetry, Jonson also faulted it for its profanity and innovative meter. He disparaged the *Anniversaries* as obsequious. Jonson’s criticisms were adopted by critics of Donne’s poetry for nearly next two centuries. In “A Discourse on the Original and Progress of Poetry” (1693), John Dryden used the term “metaphysical” for the first time to describe Donne’s poetry, characterizing Donne as more a wit than a poet.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Donne is famous for his love poems. Here are some other works of poetry that address love in a variety of ways:

"Ode to Aphrodite" (c. 600 BCE), a poem by Sappho. This poem is a plea to the goddess Aphrodite to make Sappho's beloved return her passion.

*Il Canzoniere* (1327), a poetry collection by Petrarch. This collection of 366 poems was written about Laura, the Italian poet's object of unrequited love; the first section is devoted to Laura in life, and the second is to Laura in death.

*Divan* (1368), a collection of poetry by Hafiz. Hafiz was a Persian poet who creates an ambivalent lyrical world of love in which readers can sense both love of God and passion for a romanticized person.

"Come as You Are" (1913), a poem by Rabindranath Tagore. This poem urges the beloved to hurry to him, even if her appearance is not perfect.

"Episode" (1968), a poem by Zbigniew Herbert. In this poem, the speaker mourns an argument with his beloved.

Over the next decades, scholars declared more negative criticism, with Samuel Johnson eventually writing a crushing critique of Donne's poetry in his "Life of Cowley" (1779). In this famous essay, Johnson used the term "metaphysical" as a term of abuse to describe poets whose aim, he believed, was to show off their own cleverness and learning and to construct paradoxes so outlandish and pretentious as to be ludicrous, indecent, or both. Predominantly negative assessments of Donne's poetry continued into the early nineteenth century.

The early nineteenth century saw growing interest in Donne's poetry. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Browning, and Thomas De Quincey were especially instrumental in focusing a favorable light on the works. Coleridge praised the power and vivacity of the poems; Browning publicly acknowledged Donne as a major influence; and De Quincey hailed Donne's skill as a rhetorician. When Donne's complete works were published in 1839, his sermons and devotions began to be discussed. Edmund Gosse's *Life and Letters of Dr. John Donne, Dean of St. Paul's* (1899), the first biography of Donne since 1640, prepared the way for a definitive edition of the poems, which were published in 1912. Major literary figures reviewed these works at length, bolstering a period of popular and critical interest in Donne.

In 1921, T. S. Eliot wrote a major article, "The Metaphysical Poets," in which he focused attention on Donne and the Metaphysicals as poets of stature who had

been to their age what the twentieth-century modernists were to theirs. Like the modernists, who were constructing complex, distanced poetry to reflect the spiritual vacuum at the center of modern life, Eliot argued, the Metaphysicals had written complex, emotionally charged celebrations of the joys, sorrows, and dilemmas of their own age, an age of both fleshliness and faith. Not all criticism of Donne's work was favorable at this time, however. C. S. Lewis, for example, a literary traditionalist and longtime nemesis of Eliot, found Donne's love poetry vastly overrated. From midcentury to the present day, Donne's canon has been scrutinized according to the methods of various critical schools, with representatives of the New Critics, the deconstructionists, and others offering diverse interpretations of the works. Twentieth-century writers have used phrases from Donne's poetry to adorn their own works in the form of epigrams and titles. A phrase from Donne's best-known religious devotion was adopted by Ernest Hemingway as the title of his novel of the Spanish Civil War, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940).

**Holy Sonnets** Donne's best religious poems are found in *Holy Sonnets*, written during periods of meditation and concerned with the individual believer's efforts at making peace with God. The line "What if this present were the world's last night?" typifies the intense, personal, and desperate tone of these sonnets. Frank J. Warnke argued, "The *Holy Sonnets* are, to be blunt about it, not edifying from an orthodox Christian point of view." He continued, "There is little hope in Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, and not very much trust. What one encounters, rather, is naked fear: the speaker desperately wishes to go to Heaven and—even more markedly—to escape Hell. The concentration on the self is extreme, and the terrified eloquence of that self, unforgettable."

## Responses to Literature

1. In every culture, great works of literature, art, and architecture have been created to honor religion. However, religion has also been the cause of much warfare and bloodshed. In today's world, do you think having an official religion for a country, as in Donne's time, is a good idea? Would it bring people closer together or create divisions in society?
2. It can be difficult to live up to our family's expectations of us. John Donne was descended from a famous Catholic martyr, but Donne eventually converted to Protestantism. For you, would having a famous relative—for example, in politics, art, literature, sports, science—make you more or less interested in that person's world?
3. Look up the definition of "epigram." Research examples of epigrams from Donne's time to the present and take note of what these poems might have in common. Then, write an original epigram on

the topic of your choice. It should be at least five lines long.

4. Read some of Donne's love poetry, as well as some of the poems listed in "Common Human Experience." In your view, what makes an effective love poem? Should it praise only the beloved, or should it include some conflict? Write an essay arguing your point of view. Include examples from these works, as well as examples of contemporary song lyrics if you like.

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## José Donoso

BORN: 1924, Santiago, Chile

DIED: 1996, Santiago, Chile

NATIONALITY: Chilean

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

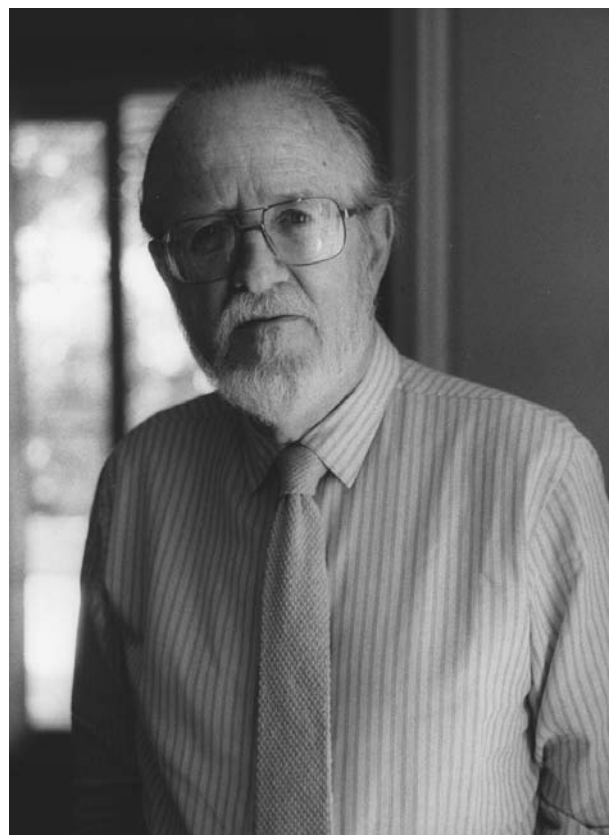
*Summertime and Other Stories* (1955)

*Coronation* (1957)

*Hell Has No Limits* (1966)

*The Obscene Bird of Night* (1970)

*A House in the Country* (1978)



José Donoso Donoso, Jose, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

### Overview

José Donoso is the most prominent Chilean novelist of the twentieth century and one of a select group of Latin American writers who achieved international notoriety in the 1960s. This was the decade of the Latin American novel's modernization by cosmopolitan writers well versed in the most significant experiments of modernist fiction in Europe and the United States.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Rich Cultural Background** José Donoso Yáñez was born in Santiago on October 5, 1924, into a family belonging to the professional middle class but with strong ties to Chilean aristocratic culture. His father, José Donoso, and both of his grandfathers were physicians, and his two brothers became lawyers. His mother was the former Alicia Yáñez. His genealogy includes politicians, historians, writers, and literary critics, and he himself holds a university degree, thus continuing a family tradition lasting four generations.

Though Donoso's parents were not themselves wealthy, his father in particular had a literary culture he shared with his son, who spent the first ten years of his schooling

in the Grange—a prestigious private school in Santiago—and who at seven years of age had a private English teacher at home. Donoso's school years were significant in ways not having to do with actually going to classes. In a 1973 article for *Review*, Donoso links his remembrance of that period of his life (1932–1942) to several themes that later were to play major roles in his fiction. Donoso emphasizes the many times he feigned stomach illness to play hooky and the way in which this deception, which fooled even his father, in time became a real ulcer, intimately linked to the creative process, either slowing or nourishing it. He remembers collapsing from a hemorrhage upon completing the manuscript of his first novel, *Coronation* (1957), and he recounts the emergency surgery performed during the long process of writing one of his later works, *The Obscene Bird of Night* (1973), which actually includes a heightened version of the incident.

Donoso's autobiographical recollections also recount how in 1929 his family moved downtown, into a large house owned by three great-aunts “who were rich, bedridden, widowed, and ‘alone in the world’ although each was surrounded by her own court of relatives and servants.” The year 1929 was the year of Black Tuesday and the stock market crash in the United States and elsewhere around the world. The ensuing Great Depression, which contributed to hyperinflation in Germany and, ultimately, to the Second World War, also led to the rise of fascist regimes throughout much of Latin America. When in 1938 the family moved back to their earlier home, its garden was to become a major symbol for Donoso—not only of renewal and growth, but strongly linked to family sentiments and fears, especially in *The Garden Next Door* (1981).

**Limited Early Recognition** Donoso's first book, a collection of short stories titled *Summertime and Other Stories* (1955) was a vanity publication, published at his expense and with the collaboration of friends, family, and subscribers. The book nonetheless made an impression on the Chilean literary scene and won the 1956 Municipal Prize for Short Stories. The following year Donoso moved away from the bustle of the city and the workaday world and lived with a fisherman friend's family in Isla Negra, the fishing village in southern Chile popularized by Pablo Neruda, who had begun to use it as a retreat in the early 1950s. When *Coronation* was published in 1957, once again Donoso had to display creative energy and muster the support of family and friends to ensure distribution.

**Mexico, the United States, and Spain** In 1963 *Coronation* was selected by the Faulkner Foundation as the best Chilean novel published in the postwar period. Shortly afterward, in 1964, Donoso and his wife—María del Pilar Serrano, whom he had met in Buenos Aires and married in 1961—accepted an invitation by the Inter-American Foundation to participate in a writers' congress in Mexico. They planned to be gone for only a few weeks,

but they did not return to Chile until 1980. In Mexico, Donoso made a living writing literary criticism for *Always* and, more importantly, wrote his next two novels, *Hell Has No Limits* (1966)—written between December of 1964 and February of the following year—and *This Sunday* (1966). *Hell Has No Limits* was the first novel published by Donoso outside of Chile—though the book is still set in Donoso's native country—and *This Sunday* was his last novel to be originally published in his native country.

After leaving Mexico, Donoso divided his time for a while between the United States (where he taught writing at the University of Iowa and at Colorado State University) and Spain, where he eventually settled in Calaceite, in the Teruel region, until 1980. He spent the years between 1965 and 1969 trying to finish a project he had started in 1963, which was to become his greatest novel to date and one of the most recognized novels of the Latin American literary boom: *The Obscene Bird of Night* (1973). One of the key elements of the book is the myth of the Imbunche, a creature taken from the folktales of the people of Chiloé Island. This island lies just off the coast of southern Chile, not far from where Donoso stayed in the 1950s.

After 1970 Donoso shifted gears in the direction of the postmodern novel, with *Sacred Families: Three Novellas* (1973). The trilogy may be considered a minor work, but Donoso's next novel, *A House in the Country* (1978), proved a major effort comparable in scope to *The Obscene Bird of Night*. In 1980 Donoso was to make his definitive return to Chile, writing in the meantime two vastly different novels—a brief, mock-erotic novel, *The Mysterious Disappearance of the Marchioness of Loria* (1981), and *The Garden Next Door* (1981), a somber and bitter semi-autobiographical narrative.

**Father of the Modern Chilean Novel** In 1986 Donoso published *Curfew*, a sober and disenchanted novel dealing with the contemporary Chilean politics Donoso witnessed firsthand. The dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet had left its mark on Donoso personally, and his response to the evils perpetrated by Pinochet's military junta earned him public recognition when Pinochet fell from power in 1990. That year, Donoso was awarded the Chilean Premio Nacional de Literatura. His break with nativism—the movement concerned with social conditions—and with the social novel of an earlier generation, shortly before he died six years later, powerfully ushered in the modern Chilean novel.

## Works in Literary Context

**Influences on Content and Style** Donoso's earliest influences were childhood games that later played major roles in his fiction. For example, he remembers a fascination with dressing up and the games he and his brothers used to stage—until parental authority intervened and

brought them to a halt. This early display of costume and playacting is evoked in the later fiction and is a model for the narration process of Donoso's most important novels.

Donoso also looked back and saw that his experiences in school, and especially of organized sports, brought out in him an incapacity to belong to any group whatsoever: political, social, or literary. As he grew older, this outsider began to make the acquaintance of the hobos and prostitutes who made their living on the outskirts of the city. These characters populate some of Donoso's novels.

Other works by Donoso show influences of the social movements of the time. Donoso's portrayal of Andrés Abalos in *Coronation*, for instance, betrays the influence of the philosophy focused on existence: existentialism. Still other earlier works show the impact of the author's interest in the well-being of the cultures—the movement called nativism during the period in literature known as the modern era, or modernism. Here Donoso's style often functions as a sort of verbal mask for the workings of historical reality. Often the narrative offers a kind of coded rendering of contemporary Chilean history, complete with veiled references and actual speeches.

***The Well-Being of Society*** Donoso's themes align with the literary movements in which he played a part: Some of his work, such as *Curfew* (1988), for example, expresses the effort to retrieve one's origins yet to create a new identity with the materials of one's history (memories and past experiences). This theme involves the human in particular and the nation as a whole, which the author calls on to take steps in favor of society's well-being and to not become mired in fantasy and cut off from present-day reality. *Curfew* and earlier works also highlight the despair of humans—whether on individual levels or on the collective level. There is an effort to believe in the promise of freedom from social codes, yet a feeling of the inescapability of some radical nothingness—of looming anarchy or lawlessness.

***The Body as Symbol*** Figuratively, Donoso often used some form of the body to represent his themes. In *The Obscene Bird of Night* (1973), the body of the author becomes a metaphoric equivalent for the body of the text. This body is one of voluntary action or ability and is involved in degrees of power—social, political, or economic. It reappears as the body of a house, a physical body, or part of a body of work (such as a painting), and runs through much of Donoso's fiction—whether emphasizing the body politic, the human body, or a body of people.

### Works in Critical Context

From the publication of his first novel, *Coronation*, Donoso was embraced by intellectuals and critics throughout Chile and other parts of the Spanish-speaking world. Although his reputation was sometimes uneven—he was criticized by some for his sympathetic portrayal of prostitutes and homosexuals in *Hell Has No Limits*, for

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Donoso's famous contemporaries include:

**Carlos Fuentes** (1928–): Mexican author whose best-selling works include *Old Gringo* and *Christopher Unborn*.

**Augusto Pinochet** (1915–2006): Chilean military leader who led a coup of the Chilean government and who served as the dictatorial president of Chile from 1973 until 1990.

**Gabriel García Márquez** (1927–): Colombian author who achieved popularity during the Latin American boom and whose works *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Love in the Time of Cholera* are among the best-known examples of magic realism.

**John Updike** (1932–): Award-winning novelist, essayist, and literary critic who is often appreciated for his in-depth chronicling of American psychological, social, and political cultures.

**Richard Nixon** (1913–1994): The thirty-seventh president of the United States, Nixon remains infamous for his criminality while in office, and is widely suspected of having supported dictator Augusto Pinochet's coup and deposing of Marxist Chilean president Salvador Allende.

example—and he spent many years in self-imposed exile, he was always considered one of the most important writers to ever emerge from Chile. Donoso dreaded simplicity and aimed to convey the complexities of society in his own often complex way, gaining criticism that revered his efforts: Walter Clemons of *Newsweek* exclaims, “He is an extraordinarily sophisticated writer in perfect control of time dissolves, contradictory voices, gritty realism and hallucinatory fugues.”

***The Obscene Bird of Night*** When *The Obscene Bird of Night* was published in 1970, reviewers were both impressed and confounded. Wolfgang Iuchtig, in *Books Abroad*, asks rhetorically, “How do you review a dream?” and John J. Hassett, writing for *Review*, argues that this is not “a novel simply to read, but one to experience in which we are continuously called upon to give the text some order by discovering its unities and its repetitions.” Robert Coover, writing for the *New York Times Book Review*, praised the work as “a dense and energetic book, full of terrible risk-taking.” In the years since its publication, *The Obscene Bird of Night* has come to be viewed as one of Donoso's most important and masterful works.

### Responses to Literature

1. In general terms, Donoso's nativism involved a concern for society's well-being. More specifically,



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Donoso's ongoing focus on the social good and on principles of communal well-being was both striking and admirable. Here are a few works by writers who have also concerned themselves with the social welfare of people in communities:

*The Birthday of the World* (2003), a short-story collection by Ursula K. LeGuin. This collection explores themes such as gender segregation, marriage between four people, and the disruption of a society whose rulers are "God."

*The Human Condition* (1958), a nonfiction book by Hannah Arendt. This work, which is central to the writer's philosophy, concerns activities in realms most important to her—labor, work, and action—in the context of society, politics, and the public and private sectors.

*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998), a nonfiction book by Giorgio Agamben. This work is an exhaustive social study by the Italian philosopher of the how the "near-sacrificial" human functions politically.

*The Polish Revolution* (2002), a nonfiction book by Timothy Ash. In this factual narrative, the author tells of the 1980 Polish shipyard workers who defied the oppression of their communist rulers.

*Sovereign Bones* (2007), a book of short stories edited by Eric Gansworth. In this short-story collection, contributing Native American authors write on the imperative of keeping a homogenous identity.

dictionary definitions describe nativism as a kind of "policy of favoring native inhabitants as opposed to immigrants." Discuss how Donoso's many moves and experiences abroad contribute to his focus on natives versus immigrants. What is his attitude or thesis concerning this general topic, precisely? Support your argument with detailed analysis of one or more of Donoso's texts.

2. Like many writers throughout history, Donoso wrote about his impressions of family. Consider Donoso's comments in *Sacred Families*. To what extent do you agree with his view of the family? What is the strongest argument in favor of the perspective he offers? Against that perspective?
3. In Donoso's early works, such as *Coronation*, he was credited with offering a realistic portrayal of upper-class Chilean society. Find some examples in *Coronation* that describe upper-class life or characters. Based on these, how do you think Donoso viewed the upper class? Why?
4. On encountering *The Obscene Bird of Night*, many readers are perplexed, even confounded. What two

to three aspects of the book do you find most difficult, challenging, or simply annoying? Why are these aspects challenging? In what ways do such difficulties rub up against you and ask you to revise your own perspectives? What does the fact that you find these things disturbing or irritating suggest about the expectations you bring to the text? Is there a way for you and Donoso to come to an agreement of sorts? If so, how? If not, why not?

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## Fyodor Dostoevsky

BORN: 1821, Moscow, Russia

DIED: 1881, St. Petersburg, Russia

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

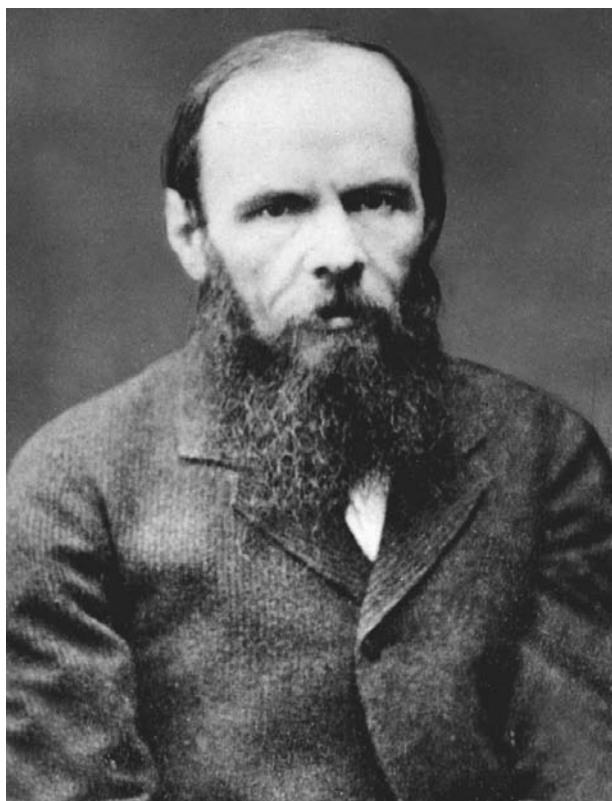
*Notes from the Underground* (1864)

*Crime and Punishment* (1866)

*The Idiot* (1869)

*The Possessed* (1872)

*The Brothers Karamazov* (1880)



Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky Russian novelist Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, photograph. © POPPERFOTO / Alamy.

## Overview

Among European writers of the nineteenth century, Fyodor Dostoevsky is the preeminent novelist of modernity. In his masterworks *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), he explored the far-ranging moral, religious, psychological, social, political, and artistic ramifications of the breakdown of traditional structures of authority and belief. He chronicled the rise and fall of the modern secular individual and traced the totalitarian potential of the new ideologies of his time, including socialism. His personal and literary engagement with the ongoing political and social issues of his time makes his work particularly interesting from a historical perspective. However, Dostoevsky's work is much more than a window into the world of nineteenth-century Russia. Modern readers continue to find Dostoevsky's work compelling because of the way he examines, as no one had previously and few have since, the potential for violence and the abuse of power in all forms of human interaction. His perfectly drawn psychological portraits of common people in distress resonate with all readers who struggle to find meaning in the world.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**A Noble Family** Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky was born on October 30, 1821, in the Moscow Mariinskii

Hospital, where his father, Mikhail Andreevich Dostoevsky, was a staff doctor. The second of seven children, he was closest to his older brother, Mikhail. Dostoevsky later wrote with warmth about his mother, Mariia Fedorovna, but wrote nearly nothing about his father and is reported to have said that his childhood was difficult and joyless. The Mariinskii Hospital served the indigent, so Dostoevsky was exposed at an early age to the results of urban poverty. The plight of the poor made a strong impression on the budding writer.

In 1828 Mikhail Andreevich Dostoevsky was granted a nobleman's rank, and shortly thereafter the family purchased an estate at Darovoe. In 1837 Dostoevsky's mother died, and in the same year Dostoevsky's father enrolled him in the Military Engineering Academy in St. Petersburg. Dostoevsky's formal education before this time was limited to a boarding school in Moscow. An episode from his journey to St. Petersburg made an overwhelming impression on Dostoevsky. While traveling by coach, he saw a courier beat the coachman on the back of his neck with his fist and with every blow the coachman whipped the horses. Dostoevsky used this scene later in *Notes from Underground* (1864) and indirectly in *Crime and Punishment* (1866) in Raskolnikov's dream of the peasant who beats his mare.

In addition to engineering, the training at the Military Engineering Academy focused on parade and drill. Dostoevsky was not a brilliant student. Dostoevsky's letters to his father from the Military Engineering Academy are mostly requests for money, but to his older brother, Mikhail, he wrote about his love for literature, especially the works of German author Friedrich Schiller and ancient Greek epic poet Homer. Dostoevsky compared Homer to Christ, arguing that in the *Iliad* Homer's vision with regard to the ancient world was similar to Christ's with regard to the new world. At the end of his life, in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), and his speech on Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin, Dostoevsky returned to the idea of universal organization and harmony, carving out a special role both for himself and for Russia in achieving these ends.

Upon completing his training and receiving his officer's rank, Dostoevsky served for one year in the draftsman's section of the engineering department in St. Petersburg before retiring in 1844 in order, as he said, to devote himself to literature. In the same year his anonymous translation of French author Honoré de Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet* appeared in print.

**Father's Death** In 1839 Dostoevsky's father died in mysterious circumstances, giving rise to a set of conflicting versions of his death. According to one account, Mikhail Andreevich was killed by his own peasants in revenge for his harsh treatment of them. The other, more likely version is that he died of a stroke. The death or absence of the father is a significant theme in Dostoevsky's work from his early fiction to his last novel. Ivan

Karamazov's line "Who does not desire the death of his father?" in *The Brothers Karamazov* has added fuel to psychoanalytic interpretations of Dostoevsky's epilepsy, which psychiatrist Sigmund Freud famously diagnosed as "hystero-epilepsy," a form of neurosis. According to this theory, Dostoevsky felt so guilty about his own desire for his father's death that he had to inflict on himself a form of punishment, which took the form of epileptic attacks. According to the account left by Dr. Stepan Dmitrievich Ianovsky, who treated Dostoevsky in the first part of his life, Dostoevsky did not experience severe attacks of epilepsy in the late 1830s, when his father died, but in the late 1840s.

**Poverty in Russia** In 1844 Dostoevsky had begun work on his first work of fiction, *Poor Folk* (1846). Dostoevsky later wrote to Mikhail that he had revised and refined the work and that he was pleased with its overall structure. It was published in 1846 to great critical acclaim.

In *Poor Folk*, an epistolary novel, Makar Devushkin, a timid and gentle clerk (his name suggests girlishness), cannot save Varvara from what he thinks is an unwanted marriage. In a letter written to his brother after the publication of the novel, Dostoevsky complained that the public "was used to seeing the author's face in his characters and could not conceive that Devushkin and not Dostoevsky was speaking." This problem was not limited to *Poor Folk*. Dostoevsky's readers continued to identify the author with the ideological positions taken by his characters and sometimes with their criminal acts.

**Psychology and Urbanization** Near the end of *Poor Folk*, Makar Devushkin remarks to himself that "everything has doubled" within him. Dostoevsky's next work, *The Double* carried on this theme. It was also published in 1846, but was not well received at the time. *The Double* tells the bizarre story of another little clerk, Iakov Petrovich Goliadkin. Goliadkin encounters his double in the form of Goliadkin Junior, an insolent and more daring version of himself. Goliadkin Junior insinuates himself into the hero's good graces, discovers his weaknesses, including his social ambition and resentment, and finally usurps his position entirely.

Characters driven to madness or near madness were a fixture of Dostoevsky's early "Petersburg" stories. Dostoevsky blamed the dehumanizing effects of the urban, bureaucratic Petersburg in part of the destruction of his characters' personalities. Dostoevsky continued to explore this "Petersburg" theme in such works as "The Landlady" (1847), "White Nights" (1848), "A Weak Heart" (1848), and *Netochka Nezvanova*. He never finished *Netochka Nezvanova*; he was arrested and imprisoned for anti-government political activity in 1849.

**Near Death and Hard Labor** Dostoevsky and other members of the reading circle of radical Mikhail Butashevich-Petrashkevsky were arrested in 1849. A court

appointed by Czar Nicholas I in November of that year condemned Dostoevsky to death. In early December the death sentence was commuted, and in Dostoevsky's case the punishment was reduced first to eight years and then to four years of hard labor, to be followed by service in the army with a restoration of civil rights. On December 22, 1849, Dostoevsky and his fellow-prisoners were told, however, that they would be executed by firing squad. At the last moment, the execution was stopped, and the prisoners were informed of their real sentences. Mock executions were the norm when death sentences were commuted by the czar, but usually prisoners were informed in advance that the execution would be nothing more than a ceremony. What made this one unusual was that the prisoners did not know that their lives were to be spared. Czar Nicholas I wanted to make a great impression on the prisoners.

He succeeded. In subsequent works Dostoevsky wrote about the horror of certain death. In *The Idiot*, for example, Prince Myshkin describes how the prisoner greedily takes in his last impressions as he is being driven to the execution and counts the seconds as the guillotine blade falls.

Dostoevsky served four years in a hard labor stockade in Omsk, followed by six years of army service in Semipalatinsk. He wrote two novellas in Siberia, neither of which has received much critical acclaim. Nevertheless, all the experiences that flowed from Dostoevsky's arrest—his imprisonment in St. Petersburg, the mock execution, life in the stockade in Omsk, and army service afterward in Semipalatinsk—had a profound impact on his later writing.

**Return to St. Petersburg** In February of 1857 Dostoevsky married Mariia Dmitrievna Isaeva. Her husband, an alcoholic, had recently died, leaving her with a young son and without income. The marriage was, by all accounts, not congenial. The severity of Dostoevsky's epileptic attacks had increased in severity after his release from the labor stockade, and he used his illness as grounds to petition the czar for a swifter return to St. Petersburg. Alexander II had ascended the throne in 1855, and the usual expectations about amnesty were heightened by his reputation for gentleness. The restoration of Dostoevsky's rights, the freedom to retire from army service, permission to publish, and permission to return to the capital progressed very slowly. He was allowed to return to St. Petersburg in December of 1859, under the watch of the secret police.

**Christianity and Aesthetics** Dostoevsky's experience in prison and in Siberia led him to embrace Christianity. His intense study of the New Testament, the only book the prisoners were allowed to read, contributed to his rejection of his earlier antireligious political views and led him to the conviction that redemption is possible only through suffering and faith, a belief which informed his later work. Dostoevsky also stressed the morally uplifting



power of beauty and art, which he came to associate with Christianity.

*House of the Dead*, Dostoevsky's thinly fictionalized account of his experience in the Omsk fortress, takes the form of loosely strung together impressions, vignettes, and scenes from prison life, beginning with first impressions and ending with release from the "house of the dead." The narrator is the nobleman Gorianchikov, imprisoned for the murder of his wife. Dostoevsky later wrote that some readers believed he had committed Gorianchikov's crime. One of the most powerful scenes concerns the prisoners' bathhouse. The filth and steam, the "roaring" of the prisoners, on whose heat-reddened bodies the scars of endured floggings stand out, and the sound of their chains make Gorianchikov think that he has entered hell. He also remarks on the morally uplifting qualities of the prisoners' theater—a living proof of what Schiller called the "aesthetic education of mankind."

**Rejection of Radicalism** In 1863 Dostoevsky made a second trip to Europe, this time to pursue his love affair with Apollinaria Prokofevna Suslova, a writer whose life fit the literary model of the emancipated woman of the times. Mariia Dmitrievna, Dostoevsky's wife, died in 1864, the same year that he lost his brother Mikhail. It was in this atmosphere that Dostoevsky wrote *Notes from the Underground* (1864) and *Crime and Punishment* (1866). In *Notes from the Underground*, Dostoevsky satirizes contemporary social and political views by presenting a narrator whose "notes" reveal that his purportedly progressive beliefs lead only to sterility and inaction.

The protagonist of *Crime and Punishment*, is a young radical by the name of Raskolnikov. The novel depicts the harrowing confrontation between his philosophical beliefs, which prompt him to commit a murder in an attempt to prove his supposed "superiority" and his inherent morality, which condemns his actions. In the novel, Dostoevsky first develops his theme of redemption through suffering.

Although he was unsuccessful with Suslova, she served as the prototype for Polina in *The Gambler* (1866), the novel that Dostoevsky completed in breathtaking speed by dictating it in twenty-six days to the stenographer Anna Grigorevna Snitkina, who became his second wife on February 15, 1867. In 1867, Dostoevsky fled to Europe with Anna to escape creditors. Although they were distressing due to financial and personal difficulties, Dostoevsky's years abroad were fruitful, for he completed one important novel and began another. *The Idiot* (1869), influenced by Hans Holbein's painting *Christ Taken from the Cross* and by Dostoevsky's opposition to the growing atheistic sentiment of the times, depicts the Christ-like protagonist's loss of innocence and his experience of sin.

Dostoevsky's profound conservatism, which marked his political thinking following his Siberian experience,

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Dostoevsky's famous contemporaries include:

**Nikolai Gogol** (1809–1852): Ukrainian writer considered one of the fathers of Russian literature.

**Charles Darwin** (1809–1882): British naturalist most famous for formulating the theory of natural selection.

**Karl Marx** (1818–1883): philosopher, economist, and revolutionary.

**Queen Victoria** (1819–1901): British monarch for sixty-three years.

**Leo Tolstoy** (1828–1910): Russian realist writer considered one of the world's leading authors.

**Samuel Clemens** (1835–1910): American writer also known as Mark Twain.

**Émile Zola** (1840–1902): French writer famous for his work of literary naturalism.

and especially his reaction against revolutionary socialism, provided the impetus for his great political novel *The Possessed* (1872). Based on a true event, in which a young revolutionary was murdered by his comrades, this novel provoked a storm of controversy for its harsh depiction of ruthless radicals. In his striking portrayal of Stavrogin, the novel's central character, Dostoevsky describes a man dominated by the life-denying forces of nihilism.

**Crowning Achievement** Dostoevsky's last work was *The Brothers Karamazov*, a family tragedy of epic proportions, which is viewed as one of the great novels of world literature. The novel recounts the murder of a father by one of his four sons. Dostoevsky envisioned this novel as the first of a series of works depicting "The Life of a Great Sinner," but early in 1881, a few months after completing *The Brothers Karamazov*, the writer died at his home in St. Petersburg.

To his contemporary readers, Dostoevsky appeared as a writer primarily interested in the terrible aspects of human existence. However, later critics have recognized that the novelist sought to plumb the depths of the psyche, in order to reveal the full range of the human experience, from the basest desires to the most elevated spiritual yearnings. Above all, he illustrated the universal human struggle to understand God and self. Dostoevsky was, as American author Katherine Mansfield wrote, a "being who loved, in spite of everything, adored life, even while he knew the dank, dark places."

### Works in Literary Context

As a young man, Dostoevsky read widely and was especially fond of the works of Homer, German Romantic

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The question of whether criminals are always punished for their misdeeds has been the subject of much myth and fiction since the time of the ancient Greeks. According to Greek myth, the fearsome Furies, symbols of the conscience, would hound and torment wrongdoers into madness. Modern writers have been less sure of the power of the conscience to punish criminals. Here are a few works that examine "crime and punishment":

*Oedipus Rex* (c. 429 B.C.E.), a play by Sophocles. This play tells the story of the ill-fated Oedipus, who kills his father and marries his mother.

"The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843), a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. In this famous short story, a murderer is convinced he hears the still-beating heart of his victim.

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), a novel by Oscar Wilde. A beautiful, but unscrupulous, young man allows his vices full reign in this novel. His sins catch up with him in an unusual way.

*Match Point* (2005), a film directed and written by Woody Allen. This film follows this life of a social-climbing tennis coach who turns to murder when his marriage to a socialite is threatened by his mistress's pregnancy.

Friedrich Schiller, Russian novelist Nikolai Gogol, and Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin.

**Existentialism** All of Europe was in a state of quasi-revolution in the mid-nineteenth century. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *The Communist Manifesto*, which called on the working class to rise up against the bourgeois social order, was published in 1848. Similar radical social and political ideas circulated among young intellectuals in Russia, and Dostoevsky was heavily influenced by them. The radical philosophies he embraced are reflected in his early work, which is seen by some critics as an early instance of existentialism in literature. Existentialism is the term used to describe a philosophy that holds that there is no meaning in life other than what individuals create for themselves. This somewhat bleak perspective is associated with fiction that portrays characters coming to grips with reality and experiencing feelings of malaise, boredom, and alienation. Dostoevsky's early fiction, particularly his "Petersburg" tales, exhibit strong existentialist traits in keeping with the anti-religious radical philosophy he espoused. His characters feel alienated from both society and themselves.

Dostoevsky moves away from his early existentialism in his later books. The transition can be seen in *Crime and Punishment*, in which the protagonist, Raskolnikov, puts his own radical philosophy into action and then must come to grips with the consequences.

**Corruption and Redemption** One of Dostoevsky's dominant themes was the idea that modern urban life is corrupt, but that redemption is possible through suffering and atonement. This idea is central to *Crime and Punishment*. The protagonist, Raskolnikov, is corrupted by the extreme philosophies circulated among St. Petersburg's intellectuals to the point that he commits a gruesome double murder. It is only in prison, where he must suffer and repent, that he finds a path to redemption through Christianity.

**Emphasis on Drama and Dialog** One of the aspects of Dostoevsky's writing style that makes his books so dramatic and engaging is the strength of his dialog. More so than previous writers, Dostoevsky propelled his plots forward with the strength of multiple, fully independent and unique character voices. In this way, he moved away from a reliance on the "authorial voice" that characterized other fiction of the time.

**Impact on Later Generations** Dostoevsky is credited with the development of both existentialist literature and the creation of the "antihero"—a protagonist who often lacks laudable qualities. *Notes from the Underground* was particularly influential with such writers as Albert Camus, André Gide, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Hermann Hesse. In Russian literature, the influence of *Notes from the Underground* can be traced in such writers as Leonid Nikolaevich Andreev, Fedor Kuz'mich Sologub, Vsevolod Mikhailovich Garshin, and Mikhail Petrovich Artsybashev in the early part of the twentieth century, and in the period following the revolution, in such writers as Iurii Karlovich Olesha.

Dostoevsky also influenced "father of psychology" Sigmund Freud, who published his essay "Dostoevsky and Parricide" in 1928 as an introduction to a German edition of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoevsky's examination of the many influences on his characters' psychology foreshadows the development of Freud's own psychoanalytical method.

## Works in Critical Context

Dostoevsky's work was generally well received by critics during his lifetime. *Poor Folk* was published in 1846 to great critical acclaim. The writer Dmitri Grigorovich, who shared an apartment with Dostoevsky, presented the manuscript to the writer and critic Nikolai Alekseevich Nekrasov, who spent all night reading it and the next morning told the critic Vissarion Belinsky that a new Gogol had appeared. Belinsky said that Dostoevsky had produced the first "social novel" in Russia and had made the truth accessible even to the most unthinking reader. Belinsky was not as impressed with Dostoevsky's next work, *The Double*, but later critics were intrigued by the philosophical and psychological theme of "double-ness" that Dostoevsky skillfully explored in his writing. Dmitrii Chizhevsky, in an article first published in 1928, was among the first critics to expound on the significance of

the double as a philosophical problem in Dostoevsky's works, including such later works as *The Possessed* (1872), *The Adolescent* (1875), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880).

***Crime and Punishment*** Upon publication in 1866, *Crime and Punishment* was widely praised, primarily for the depth of its psychological analysis. In contrast, the radical critic Dmitrii Ivanovich Pisarev emphasized the depth of Dostoevsky's socioeconomic analysis, arguing that Raskolnikov was driven by the "struggle for existence." Russian author Ivan Turgenev and Anatolii Fedorovich Koni, a leading jurist, both praised the work. Some radical critics charged that Dostoevsky had misrepresented the younger generation and its ideas. The symbolist poet Viacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov read *Crime and Punishment* in a mythic-religious framework, comparing this and Dostoevsky's other works to ancient tragedy. According to Ivanov, Raskolnikov's guilt is the guilt of all humanity toward Mother Earth. In Ivanov's view, Raskolnikov acts in the role of the scapegoat, the substitute sacrificial victim. Twentieth-century author André Gide, whose own writing was influenced by *Crime and Punishment*, argues that Raskolnikov fails in his attempt to be more than ordinary, while another twentieth-century writer, Thomas Mann, called this work the greatest crime novel of all time.

*Crime and Punishment* had a profound effect on German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who said that Dostoevsky was "the only psychologist from whom he had anything to learn." The Russian philosopher Nikolai Aleksandrovich Berdiaev saw in Raskolnikov's crime the crisis of modern, rational humanism with its glorification of the individual.

One of most productive sources of Dostoevsky criticism in general and *Crime and Punishment* in particular has been psychoanalysis and other forms of scientific psychology. R. D. Laing and Karen Horney are among the many professional psychologists who use Raskolnikov and other Dostoevskian heroes as examples of psychological phenomena. Alfred Bem, a Russian scholar, wrote a series of sophisticated literary studies published in the 1930s that traced the structure of the id and guilt in *Crime and Punishment* and in Dostoevsky's early fiction in general. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, critic Mikhail Bakhtin also emphasizes the importance of Raskolnikov's consciousness, arguing that everything in the novel is "projected against him and dialogically reflected in him."

***The Possessed*** *The Possessed* was received coolly by many contemporary readers, as those in favor of the student movements of the time accused Dostoevsky of slandering an entire generation as insane fanatics. The radical critic Nikolai Konstantinovich Mikhailovsky gave sarcastic praise to Dostoevsky's "brilliant psychiatric talent" in the novel; in so doing he implied that Dostoev-

sky's own psychological state was somehow peculiar and extreme.

For many twentieth-century critics, *The Possessed* signals the end of the nineteenth-century realist tradition. As critic Edward Said remarks in *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975), text, time, and understanding fall out of sync in *The Possessed*. Normal genealogy is suspended; the family is shattered; and the events of the novel seem to overtake the control of their creator. In *Dostoevsky and the Novel* (1977), Michael Holquist argues that the division of Stavrogin's persona among all the other characters—for example, Shatov and Kirillov—signals the disruption of the coherent individual self upon which the realist novel usually depends. Instead of the story of the formation of a personality and the development of character, *The Possessed* is a revelation of the disintegration of personality. *The Possessed* thus provides a transition to new literary forms of the twentieth century: for example, the technique of fantastic realism and the supernatural and demonic motifs that dominate that novel are greatly beholden to *The Possessed*. J. M. Coetzee's 1994 novel *The Master of Petersburg* is loosely based on *The Possessed* and on episodes from Dostoevsky's life.

***The Brothers Karamazov*** During its serial publication *The Brothers Karamazov* was reviewed extensively in the Russian press. Konstantin Nikolaevich Leontev protested the overly "rosy" Christianity of the elder Zosima, arguing that it distorted the principles of Russian Orthodoxy. In 1894 Vasily Rozanov published a study of Dostoevsky's works as a whole, focusing in particular on *The Brothers Karamazov*. Although Rozanov reserved special praise for Ivan's "Rebellion" and the "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor," he also saw great profundity in Zosima's belief that God had taken "seeds from the other world" and placed them on earth.

The perhaps overly simplistic question as to whether Dostoevsky sided with Ivan or Zosima has concerned critics. Albert Camus's *The Rebel* (1951) argued that Ivan's rebellion, based on reason alone, leads to insanity. Other critics see in Ivan's suffering a form of imitation of Christ and thus an unwitting refutation of his rejection of Christ. Robert L. Belknap has also shown how Dostoevsky refutes Ivan's claims by a series of ad hominem arguments. Sven Linner and Jostein Bortnes examine the religious dimensions of the novel, and Valentina Evgeneva Vetlovskaja has shown the significance of the "Life of Aleksei the Man of God" for the character of Alesha.

One of the open critical questions about *The Brothers Karamazov* has to do with the fate of Alesha and the possibility of a second installment of the novel. There is some evidence that Dostoevsky planned to write a second volume in which Alesha would become a revolutionary and commit a political crime. Not all critics accept that Dostoevsky planned to write a second installment.

**Modern Critical Reception** The study of Dostoevsky, both inside and outside Russia, has been shaped in important ways by his status in that country. In 1972 the massive thirty-volume edition of the complete works of Dostoevsky was undertaken by the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg. This edition, with its extensive explanatory notes, bibliographical references, publication histories, draft editions, and variant versions, has been the crucial resource for generations of Dostoevsky scholars all over the world. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, aspects of Dostoevsky's work that were neglected have come to the foreground. These aspects include a closer examination of his politics, both his critique of socialism and his rapprochement with czarist circles, and the study of religious themes and motifs in his works.

In recent years, Dostoevsky scholars have taken advantage of a great variety of critical approaches opened up by feminism, ethnic studies, and the work of Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Emmanuel Levinas. At the same time, a new tendency has emerged, which emphasizes Dostoevsky's Christianity above all else. The publication of hard-to-find memoirs and new studies based on archival documents continues. An important source book that exemplifies this type of work is the three-volume chronicle of Dostoevsky's life based on his letters and other documents, edited by N. F. Budanova and G. M. Fridlender (1993–1995). In both Russia and the West, the work of Mikhail Bakhtin has been established as a cornerstone of Dostoevsky criticism.

## Responses to Literature

1. What role do the female characters in Dostoevsky's works play? Do you think they fall into easy categories like good and evil? Or are they fully flesh-out characters in their own rights?
2. Dostoevsky is often praised by critics for keeping his own "voice" out of his novels and giving his characters strong, distinct voices with which to speak for themselves. Do you agree with this assessment? As you read the works of Dostoevsky, do you notice any "intrusions" by the author? If so, in what way do they appear?
3. Czar Peter the Great built St. Petersburg to be a modern, western city. In Dostoevsky work, however, it is portrayed as dehumanizing and cold. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about St. Petersburg and its history. What other writers have used St. Petersburg as a setting? Write a paper tracing the different ways St. Petersburg has been presented in literature.
4. Dostoevsky was said to have had a "conversion experience" while in prison that led him to embrace Christianity. Many other famous figures throughout history have made dramatic personal transformations

while in prison—people as diverse as Oscar Wilde, Malcolm X, and Martha Stewart. Select one such person and research their life using library resources and the Internet. Then write a paper explaining what it was about the prison experience that caused your subject to change.

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NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

*A Study in Scarlet* (1887)

*The Sign of Four* (1890)

*The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892)

*The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902)

*The Lost World* (1912)

### Overview

Although, as critic Ivor Brown has noted, “there was far more in Doyle’s literary life than the invention of his fascinating and volatile detective,” it is as the creator of Sherlock Holmes that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is remembered. The volumes of historical analysis for which he was knighted have been virtually forgotten; his extensively researched historical novels have not endured. Likewise, his other stories and novels, including some works of early science fiction, are largely overshadowed by the



Arthur Conan Doyle The Library of Congress

exploits of Holmes, the world’s first consulting detective and one of the most famous literary creations of all time.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**An Aspiring Doctor** Arthur Conan Doyle was born in Edinburgh, Scotland on May 22, 1859, into an Irish Roman Catholic family of noted artistic achievement. After attending Stonyhurst College in Lancashire, he entered Edinburgh University as a medical student in 1876. One of his mentors at Edinburgh was Dr. Joseph Bell, who would later serve Doyle as the model for his detective Sherlock Holmes. Doyle received a doctor of medicine degree in 1885. In his spare time, however, he began to write stories.

Doyle grew up in a time known as the Victorian era, during which Queen Victoria ruled England and its territories (including Scotland). Queen Victoria sat on the throne longer than any other British monarch, from 1837 until 1901. This period saw significant changes for both Britain and Europe as a whole, with industrialization leading much of the population to jobs in factories instead of on farms as in the past. The era also saw advances in the sciences and scientific thinking, reflected in Doyle’s detective fiction.

**Early Writing and the Birth of Holmes** After two long sea voyages as a ship’s doctor, Doyle practiced medicine at Southsea, England, from 1882 to 1890. In 1885 he married Louise Hawkins and in March 1891 moved his young family to London, where he began to specialize in ophthalmology. His practice remained small, however, and since one of his anonymous stories—a hoax about the real-life “ghost ship” *Marie Celeste* called “Habakuk Jephson’s Statement”—had enjoyed considerable success when it appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1884, he began to devote himself seriously to writing.

The result was his first novel, *A Study in Scarlet*, which introduced the detective Sherlock Holmes to the reading public in *Beeton’s Christmas Annual* for 1887. This was followed by two historical novels in the tradition of Sir Walter Scott, *Micah Clarke* in 1889 and *The White Company* in 1891. The immediate and prolonged success of these works led Doyle to abandon medicine and launch his career as a man of letters.

The second Sherlock Holmes novel, *The Sign of the Four* (1890), was followed by the first Holmes short story, “A Scandal in Bohemia” (1891). The instant popularity of these tales made others like them a regular monthly feature of the *Strand Magazine*, and the famous *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* series was begun. In subsequent stories Doyle developed Holmes into a highly individualized and eccentric character, together with his companion, Dr. Watson, the narrator of the stories, and the pair came to be readily accepted as living persons by readers in England and America. In addition to his



popularity among the reading public, Holmes's use of scientific techniques in solving crimes both echoed and helped popularize forensic science, particularly finger printing which was in its infancy in the nineteenth century. Further, Holmes's use of observation and deduction paralleled some of the important discoveries of nineteenth-century science, such as Charles Darwin published in *The Origin of the Species* and William Smith in the *Geological Map of England and Wales and Scotland*.

But Doyle seems to have considered these stories a distraction from his more serious writing, eventually grew tired of them, and in "The Final Problem," published in December 1893, plunged Holmes and his archenemy, Dr. Moriarty, to their apparent deaths in the falls of Reichenbach. Nine years later, however, he published a third Sherlock Holmes novel, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, but dated the action before Holmes's "death." Then, in October 1903, Holmes effected his mysterious resurrection in "The Empty House" and thereafter appeared intermittently until 1927, three years before Doyle's own death. All told, Doyle wrote fifty-six Sherlock Holmes stories and four novels (*The Valley of Fear*, 1914, was the last).

**Other Literary Aspirations** Among the other works published early in his career, which Doyle felt were more representative of his true artistry, were *Beyond the City* (1892), a short novel of contemporary urban life; *The Great Shadow* (1892), a historical novel of the Napoleonic period; *The Refugees* (1893), a historical novel about French Huguenots; and *The Stark Munro Letters* (1894), an autobiographical novel. In 1896 he issued one of his best-known historical novels, *Rodney Stone*, which was followed by another historical novel, *Uncle Bernac* (1897); a collection of poems, *Songs of Action* (1898); and two less popular novels, *The Tragedy of Korosko* (1898) and *A Duet* (1899).

**Nonfiction Work** After the outbreak of the Boer War, Doyle's energy and patriotic zeal led him to serve as chief surgeon of a field hospital at Bloemfontein, South Africa, in 1900. His *The Great Boer War* (1900) was widely read and praised for its fairness to both sides. In 1902 he wrote a long pamphlet, *The War in South Africa: Its Cause and Conduct*, to defend the British action in South Africa against widespread criticism by pacifist groups. In August 1902 Doyle was knighted for his service to England.

After being twice defeated, in 1900 and 1906, in a bid for a seat in Parliament, Sir Arthur published *Sir Nigel* (1906), a popular historical novel of the Middle Ages. The following year he married his second wife, Jean Leckie (his first wife having died of tuberculosis in 1906). Doyle now took up a number of political and humanitarian causes. In 1909 he wrote *Divorce Law Reform*, championing equal rights for women in British law, and *The Crime of the Congo*, attacking the exploitation of that colony by Belgium. In 1911 he published a second col-

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Doyle's famous contemporaries include:

**Queen Victoria** (1819–1901): The longest-reigning British monarch (sixty-three years), she gave her name to the age. Her "hands off" approach to rule allowed a succession of dynamic prime ministers to chart an imperialist course for Britain.

**Brigham Young** (1801–1877): First governor of Utah and president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 1847 to his death. Called the "American Moses" by his followers for leading them through the desert to the "promised land" near the Great Salt Lake.

**Rudyard Kipling** (1865–1936): English author and poet, remembered chiefly for his stories set in India as well as his pro-Imperialist poems such as "Gunga Din."

**Thomas Hardy** (1840–1928): English novelist whose work explored the psychological depth of characters whose lives were nonetheless determined by societal forces outside their control.

**Oliver Wendell Holmes** (1808–1894): Popular American poet, novelist, doctor, lecturer, and wit, he dominated the intellectual life of New England for much of the nineteenth century.

lection of poems, *Songs of the Road*, and in 1912 began a series of science fiction stories with the novel *The Lost World*, featuring another of his famous characters, Professor Challenger.

After the outbreak of World War I, Doyle organized the Civilian National Reserve against the threat of German invasion. In 1916 he published *A Visit to Three Fronts* and in 1918 again toured the front lines. These tours, plus extensive correspondence with a number of high-ranking officers, enabled him to write his famous account *The British Campaigns in France and Flanders*, published in six volumes (1916–1919).

**Spiritualism** Doyle had been interested in spiritualism since he rejected his Roman Catholic faith in 1880. In 1915 he apparently experienced a "conversion" to "psychic religion," so that after the war he devoted the rest of his life and career to propagating his new faith in a series of works: *The New Revelation* (1918), *The Vital Message* (1919), *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist* (1921), and *History of Spiritualism* (1926). From 1917 to 1925 he lectured on spiritualism throughout Europe, Australia, the United States, and Canada. The same cause led him to South Africa in 1928 and brought him home from Sweden exhausted, in 1929. He died on July 6, 1930, of a heart attack, at his home in Crowborough, Sussex.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Conan Doyle's various literary forays, from detective story to historical novel to tales of high adventure, all had established precedents from earlier in the 19th century:

*Ivanhoe* (1819), a novel by Sir Walter Scott. Considered the first great historical novel, this book, set in twelfth-century England, single-handedly kicked off a medieval revival craze that would influence English art, literature, and architecture for decades to come.

"The Purloined Letter" (1844), a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. This short story is often considered the first detective story, or as Poe called them, "tales of ratiocination."

*King Solomon's Mines* (1885), a novel by H. Rider Haggard. This novel set in Africa features the character of Alan Quatermain leading a rescue party into "Darkest Africa."

### Works in Literary Context

**Detective Fiction** Although the Sherlock Holmes stories quickly became the definitive detective stories of their age, they were not the first. That honor is often accorded to Edgar Allan Poe, who wrote several stories featuring the fictional detective C. Auguste Dupin.

Charles Dickens also dipped his quill into detective mysteries with his novel *Bleak House*, and his protégé Wilkie Collins is often called the "grandfather of detective fiction." Collins's novel *The Moonstone* (1868) is considered by some to be the greatest piece of detective fiction ever written.

Detective fiction has often been categorized as pure entertainment. In recent decades, criticism has begun to shift toward a more serious consideration of these tales. Doyle's detective stories are seen as fascinating clues to the culture in which they were written and as explorations of the attitudes characteristic of late-Victorian life.

**Influence** In addition to the inestimable influence his Holmes stories have had, Doyle's *Lost World* has spawned several cinematic adaptations, some overt, some, such as *King Kong* and *Jurassic Park*, mere homages. His Professor Challenger stories anticipated later magic realist and neo-realist efforts to blend rigorous scientific observation with fantastic events and landscapes.

### Works in Critical Context

Most early book reviewers had favorable opinions of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. Typical is the judgment voiced by one anonymous critic in a British periodical, *The Athenaeum*, who said of the collection, "Of its kind it is excellent; there is little literary pretension about it, and

there is hardly any waste of time about subtle character-drawing; but incident succeeds incident with the most businesslike rapidity, and the unexpected always occurs with appropriate regularity." Another reviewer, William Morton Payne, singled out "The Red-Headed League" for particular note in an American journal, *The Dial*, remarking that the story "is a striking illustration of the author's originality." Years later, Doyle cited the same reason for ranking "The Red-Headed League" as his second favorite Holmes story (with "The Speckled Band" first). In 1959, a poll among readers of the *Baker Street Journal*, a magazine for Sherlock Holmes fans, concurred with Doyle.

**Sherlockian Opinions** The largest body of criticism on the Sherlock Holmes stories comes from groups of enthusiasts who call themselves "Sherlockians" or "Holmesians." In over fifty journals and newsletters published worldwide, the most prominent being the American *Baker Street Journal* and British *Sherlock Holmes Journal*, writers attempt to resolve inconsistencies in the stories or deduce aspects of Holmes's and Watson's lives from clues given in the stories. The central premise shared by these writers, from which much of the fun of their essays arises, is that Holmes was an actual person who solved real mysteries.

Such articles must obviously be read from the same tongue-in-cheek perspective in which they were written. However, they often provide worthwhile information on the historical background of Doyle's stories and testify to the mystique Sherlock Holmes still holds today. One of the best examples of criticism in this "Sherlockian" vein is Gordon L. Iseminger's essay on Holmes as a Victorian archetype, since it demonstrates ways in which Holmes was a product of the culture from which he emerged.

Growing attention to both popular fiction as a category and Doyle as a writer has led critics and readers alike to reexamine Doyle's other writing, such as his science fiction and historical novels. This nearly forgotten body of work is proving to be of interest in its own right, along with its value in illuminating relationships between different types of popular fiction and parallels to the immortal Holmes stories.

### Responses to Literature

1. Criminology was a field in its infancy when Doyle wrote his Holmes stories. Using your library and the Internet, research some of the techniques used by police to catch criminals in the nineteenth century, twentieth century, and today. Write a paper covering developments in forensics since the mid-nineteenth century.
2. The characters Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson came to be accepted as real by many readers at the time they were first published, and contemporary enthusiasts continue to treat the characters as if they



were real, using details in the stories to infer further aspects of the personalities of Holmes and Watson. As you read the stories, notice the eccentricities of character and specific details of characterization that have made readers view the detective and his aide as historic figures.

3. Sherlock Holmes was a quintessentially British character, yet he was as popular in America as in England. Research cultural factors in turn-of-the-century America that could account for the popularity. You might also consider other factors that might have made Holmes appeal to Americans that wouldn't necessarily have appealed to British readers.
4. The Sherlock Holmes stories reflected the late Victorian culture in which they were written. The stories present the daily life, social mores, and class concerns of Victorian England. Use your library and the Web to research the social and sexual conventions for which the Victorians were known. How are these conventions different from those of contemporary society?
5. Research the principles of logic known as induction and deduction. Distinguish between them, and identify the elements of each demonstrated by Sherlock Holmes's reasoning in a Holmes story of your choice. You might wish to judge which principle predominates in Holmes's thinking, or which most aids Holmes in solving the mystery. Then write a report calling attention to use of induction and deduction in the Holmes story you have chosen.

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## Margaret Drabble

BORN: 1939, Sheffield, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Waterfall* (1969)

*The Needle's Eye* (1972)

*The Realms of Gold* (1975)

### Overview

A respected editor and writer, Margaret Drabble made her reputation in the early 1960s as the preeminent novelist of the modern woman. She is best known for her novels that chronicle the negative effects of dramatic changes in contemporary British society on the lives of well-educated women. Critics generally distinguish two phases in Drabble's career as a novelist: Her first five works focus on young women who struggle with professional, sexual, maternal, and social conflicts as they



Margaret Drabble Drabble, Margaret, photograph. AP Images.

attempt to establish careers and discover their identities, while her later novels combine commentary on women's concerns with panoramic views of modern England. Drabble's realistic fiction often shows how fate and coincidence are important to how we understand and accept our individual destinies. She has also written well-regarded works of criticism and biography and has edited several influential volumes, including the fifth edition of the esteemed *Oxford Companion to English Literature*.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Days of Illness and Books** The second of four children, Margaret Drabble was born in Sheffield, Yorkshire, on June 5, 1939, to Kathleen Bloor and John Frederick Drabble. Her parents broke from family roots by attending the university and separating themselves from strong religious practice. Drabble had a diverse religious upbringing: She attended Anglican services with her father because her mother, raised in a repressive fundamentalist tradition, had become a devout atheist. Drabble was also very much affected by the Quakers and attended a Quaker boarding school.

Drabble grew up in a household that embraced books and learning. Her father, also an author, was a lawyer and then a circuit judge; her only brother is also a lawyer. Before and after childrearing, her mother taught English; her younger sister is an art historian, and her older sister, Antonia, is a famous novelist who writes under the name A. S. Byatt.

Despite being part of a large and interesting family, Drabble has described her childhood as lonely. Often ill, she once wrote: "I had a bad chest and was always rather feeble—hated games. I certainly did not feel I was part of the main stream." She spent much of her time alone writing, reading, and "just being secretive." She had an early and constant love of literature, and she was profoundly affected as a child by John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

At the Quaker Mount School where Drabble was educated, she made many friends and became more socially oriented. Like her father and her older sister, she went on to Cambridge University with a major scholarship. She studied English literature at Newnham College and "enjoyed it so much," she claimed, that it "took me a long time to get over it." While at the university, she stopped writing stories in her head and started acting, with some success, because "it was so much more sociable."

**Feminism's Second Wave** Though the struggle for women's rights goes back centuries, many of the most important advances in the rights of women have taken place in the past one hundred years. This included earning the right to vote in many countries, gaining representative positions in government, and achieving greater

equality in the workplace. After these gains were made, however, women still struggled to reach full equality with men. This led in the 1960s to the "Second Wave" of feminism, in which feminists struggled to attain completely equal rights. This also led to a flowering of feminist art, nonfiction, and fiction, with many female authors gaining popularity for their unique and insightful views on the place of women in modern society.

**From Stage to Page** In 1960 Drabble graduated with honors, and she might have stayed on as a lecturer if she had not wanted to be an actress. She married Clive Swift the week after she left Cambridge and went with him to work with the Royal Shakespeare Company, understudying Vanessa Redgrave and doing occasional walk-ons. Drabble has described her life at this point as without an objective, consisting of "jumping over obstacles: marriage, having babies." Bored with such small roles as a fairy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and expecting her first child, she began writing her first novel, *A Summer Bird-Cage* (1963), to fill the time and disprove the myth that "one kind of creativity displaces another."

Other factors contributed to her becoming a novelist. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*—a detailed analysis of women's oppression and a foundational work in contemporary feminism—presented her with information and inspiration that was personally relevant to Drabble. She did not feel personally or directly committed to the women's movement or feminism, however. In one interview, she said, "The women's movement is a phenomenon that got started after I got started, so I don't really see where I fit into it." She has in recent years, however, become much more politically engaged and has been a powerful spokesperson against the American and British war in Iraq.

Drabble has expanded the range of her writing, now including screenplays and dramas, and brought her extensive knowledge of British literature to works of criticism, essays, reviews, and journalism. She was made a Citizen of the British Empire in 1980, and Cambridge awarded her an honorary doctorate in 2006.

## Works in Literary Context

Margaret Drabble's rise as one of the most important and well-known British novelists writing today has been steady and sure. She has received serious attention in Great Britain since the appearance of her first novel, and ever since the publication of *The Needle's Eye* (1972) she has established an impressive reputation in America as well. She is a traditionalist in form and a pioneer in subject matter. From her first novel, written immediately after graduation from Cambridge, Drabble has recorded the conflicting sensibilities of the new, educated woman seeking her place in the modern world. Her heroines are self-aware, articulate, intelligent, career-concerned; they are also wives and mothers caring for and redeemed by their children. Her key themes tend toward the

contemporary woman's struggle for emotional, moral, and economic independence. She also explores the individual's search for identity; the particular self-awareness of womanhood; the individual's relationship with the personal and national past; the interaction of fate, chance, and character; and the guilt and anxieties of the liberal conscience.

**Women and Society** In her early novels, including *A Summer Bird-Cage* (1963), *The Garrick Year* (1964), and *The Millstone* (1965; republished as *Thank You All Very Much*), Drabble drew upon her personal experiences to present psychological portraits of intelligent, sensitive young women in the process of adjusting to social roles and fate. This theme appeared in some of her subsequent novels, as well. In *The Waterfall* (1969), for example, Drabble's characteristic topics of maternity and sexuality are united in the story of an unconventional love affair. The heroine, an unfulfilled housewife who has been abandoned by her husband, is nursed through childbirth by her brother-in-law. Through the brief, passionate romance that develops, the lovers are awakened to a stronger sense of freedom and self-awareness. *The Needle's Eye* (1972) initiated Drabble's use of more varied themes, concerns, and characters, and especially reflected both Drabble's deep interest in ethics and morality and her lack of orthodoxy. Like her, the novel's heroine, Rose Vassiliou, is unsure of her theology but possessed of a conviction that she must do right. An altruistic, upper-middle-class woman, Rose hopes to achieve spiritual grace by renouncing material wealth and embracing a working-class lifestyle in a poor section of London. Although fateful events continually frustrate her plans for salvation, Rose's verve and idealism, coupled with her talent for self-analysis, which is demonstrated through interior monologues, allow her to gain a sense of direction in her life.

**Social Issues** Drabble's interest in social issues became particularly evident in her succeeding novels, including *The Ice Age* (1977), *The Middle Ground* (1980), *The Radiant Way* (1987), *Natural Curiosity* (1989), and *The Gates of Ivory* (1991). In these novels, the author puts forward an apocalyptic vision of Britain. England is presented as a bleak, alienating environment in social decline where sudden calamities and random violence are commonplace. In *The Radiant Way*, in particular, Drabble made a sweeping indictment of England, writing about grisly crimes committed by a serial murderer, crimes meant to symbolize the country's social chaos.

**Influences** As she has often reiterated in interviews, Drabble's models have been the great British novelists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—George Eliot, the Brontës, Arnold Bennett, Henry James, and Virginia Woolf. Like George Eliot and Arnold Bennett, in particular, she writes in the realist tradition.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Drabble's famous contemporaries include:

**Betty Friedan** (1921–2006): American feminist, activist and writer, best known for starting what is called the "Second Wave" of feminism through the writing of her book *The Feminine Mystique*.

**Helen Frankenthaler** (1928–): American post-painterly abstraction artist. Originally influenced by the work of Jackson Pollock, Frankenthaler was deeply involved in the 1946–1960 abstract art movement.

**Truman Capote** (1924–1984): American writer whose stories, novels, plays, and nonfiction are recognized literary classics, including the novella *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958) and *In Cold Blood* (1965), which he labeled a "nonfiction novel."

**Gloria Steinem** (1934–): A writer and editor who, during the 1960s, appeared as a leader in the women's movement in the United States. In 1970 she cofounded *Ms.*, which grew to be a leading feminist magazine.

**A. S. Byatt** (1936–): This postmodern poet and author of the award-winning novel *Possession* (1990) is Margaret Drabble's older sister.

## Works in Critical Context

Although Drabble is most often praised for her unblinking portrayal of the uncertainties women feel about motherhood and the enforced domesticity that usually accompanies it, critical reviews of her work have been mixed. Feminist reaction to Drabble's work has perhaps been the most negative.

**The Ice Age** Nancy Hardin, for example, wrote that "Drabble's novels are studies of human nature with the emphasis on feminine nature. That is not to say she is a feminist writer." Similarly, Ellen Cronan Rose acknowledged that "what Drabble seems to find difficult, if not impossible, is giving her whole-hearted support to female characters who are radically feminist in their critique of patriarchy." According to Rose, by not consistently condemning male domination, Drabble seemed to endorse aspects of it. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese severely criticized Drabble's treatment of women, suggesting that Drabble's novel *The Ice Age* "ends chillingly with a simple and total condemnation of female experience." According to Fox-Genovese, "Drabble's women offer a picture of predatory narcissism, their occasional victimhood and suffering being . . . no more than another way of getting what they want."

**The Waterfall** Drabble's *The Waterfall*, in particular, dealt with an egocentric heroine. As the author's most

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Drabble writes about her women characters' actions in the face of limitations beyond their physical, social, familiar, psychological, and spiritual control. Other works that focus on this idea include:

*The Scarlet Letter* (1850), a novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Set in puritanical Boston in the seventeenth century, this is the fictional story of Hester Prynne, a woman who commits adultery and subsequently refuses to name the father of her illegitimate child. Throughout the novel, Hawthorne explores the issues of grace, legalism, sin, and guilt, while describing Hester's struggle to create a new life of repentance and dignity.

*Madame Bovary* (1856), a novel by Gustave Flaubert. This influential work of realism focuses on a doctor's wife, Emma Bovary, who has adulterous affairs and lives beyond her means in order to escape the banalities and emptiness of domestic life.

*The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), a novel by Margaret Atwood. This novel explores themes of women in subjugation and the ways they find identity and self-definition against a backdrop of an oppressive and totalitarian religious political structure.

*Pride and Prejudice* (1813), a novel by Jane Austen. The smart and spirited heroine of this novel finds romance and self-determination by negotiating the complex codes of social manners required in England at the turn of the nineteenth century.

"experimental" work, the novel's primary stylistic characteristic is a divided narrative point of view. The main character is Jane Grey, the mother of a small child, whose husband has left her. After Jane begins a love affair with her cousin's husband, which Drabble presents as the highest and most consuming of passions, the novel switches to first-person narration. The first- and third-person voices then alternate throughout the remainder of the story, a convention that received divided reviews from critics. Caryn Fuoroli wrote that the split results from Drabble's "inability to control narration" and that the novel fails because the technique keeps her from realizing the "full potential of her material." Valerie Myer, on the other hand, wrote that *The Waterfall* is Drabble's "best expression of her central concern, that there is no true solution to the conflict between instinct and morality."

***The Needle's Eye*** One of Drabble's more acclaimed books, *The Needle's Eye*, reflected both Drabble's deep interest in ethics and morality and her lack of orthodoxy. Like Drabble, the novel's heroine, Rose Vassiliou, is unsure of her religious convictions but certain that she

must do right. She gives up her inheritance, marries an unsavory and radical young immigrant, gives away a thirty-thousand-pound legacy to a dubious African charity, and then refuses to move out of the couple's working class house into a more fashionable middle-class neighborhood. Valerie Myer pointed out that Drabble's fatalism in the novel is actually a kind of religion that brings about salvation: "For Margaret Drabble the true end of life is to reconcile flesh and spirit by accepting one's own nature and living with it, in a context of love and responsibility for others. . . . This reconciliation, the author hopes, can come about by involvement in society."

## Responses to Literature

1. How does Drabble introduce and develop her theme of reconciling instinct with morality in *The Waterfall* and *The Needle's Eye*?
2. How are motherhood, and the duties attached to it, defined by contemporary media? How does Drabble seem to define motherhood? What similarities and differences do you see between those definitions?
3. Write a brief essay explaining the corrosive nature of infidelity in *A Summer Bird Cage* and *The Middle Ground*.

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## Michael Drayton

BORN: 1563, *Hartshill, Warwickshire, England*

DIED: 1631, *London, England*

NATIONALITY: *British, English*

GENRE: *Poetry*

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Tragicall Legend of Robert, Duke of Normandy* (1596)

*To the Maiestie of King James* (1603)

*Poly-Olbion* (1612)

*Poems by Michael Drayton Esquyer* (1619)

*The Muses Elizium* (1630)

### Overview

In late-seventeenth-century estimates of literary stature, Michael Drayton ranks only slightly below Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and Ben Jonson. Until the middle of the twentieth century, Drayton's position as an important minor poet seemed secure, but his lengthy historical poems did not lend themselves to the techniques of close reading popularized during the vogue of New Criticism in the 1940s and after. By the end of his life, the didactic verse and historical epics upon which Drayton had lavished so much care no longer commanded an audience. Few documentary sources exist for the life of Michael Drayton, and even those that have survived and can be verified are not very revealing. Drayton's remarkable historical self-consciousness, however, enabled him to understand and to record in his works the changes in the role of the poet that occurred during his lifetime.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Elizabethan Beginnings** Michael Drayton was born in the vicinity of Hartshill village, Warwickshire, early in 1563. His origins were humble. His social status was inferior to that of William Shakespeare and well below that of Edmund Spenser or Samuel Daniel, both of whom went on to earn university degrees. Early-twentieth-century editors and critics who studied autobiographical anecdotes gleaned from his works, however, constructed a gentrified version of his life. Dedications, which he intended as bids for patronage, were interpreted literally as factual records of his social standing.

**Invented Youth** One such anecdote was used to construct Drayton's genteel background as a page in the



Michael Drayton *Drayton, Michael, painting. The Library of Congress.*

household of Sir Henry Goodyer the elder (1534–1595): It occurs as an aside in a poem that he published when he was sixty-four. In “Of Poets and Poesie” (1627), the speaker reminisces about his youth as “a proper goodly page,” and reports that he asked his tutor “what strange kinde of men” poets were. His “milde Tutor” directs him in vintage Elizabethan fashion to Latin classics such as Virgil’s *Eclogues*. This poem, primarily about Drayton’s interest in poetry, was for decades misconstrued as biographical.

Drayton’s account of his education offers no particulars. His “milde Tutor” might be anyone from a clergyman who educated promising village children to the schoolmaster of a grammar school. No seventeenth- or eighteenth-century biography mentions connections between Drayton and the Goodyers. However, in the late nineteenth century Drayton’s allusion was interpreted as a real reference to Sir Henry Goodyer and was used to construct—invent, ultimately—an idea of him as having had a privileged childhood at Polesworth, Sir Henry’s country manor.

**Experimental Years** Whatever his actual childhood might have been, by 1590 Drayton was probably located in London. After publishing *The Harmonie of the Church*, verse translations from Old Testament prayers, in 1591,

he experimented with a series of poetry genres between 1591 and 1595. It is significant that not one of these early works is dedicated to the Goodyers, and a pastoral collection, *Idea. The Shepherds Garland* (1593), is dedicated to Robert Dudley. His experimentation with historical complaint, *Peirs Gaveston* (c. 1594), is dedicated to Henry Cavendish. His practice with quatrains and couplets, *Ideas Mirrour* (1594), is dedicated to Anthony Cooke. And *Matilda* (1594) and *Endimion and Phoebe* (1595)—both narratives—are dedicated to Lucy Harington, later Lucy Harington Russell, Countess of Bedford.

This profusion of formal experiments and dedications offers contemporary readers a significant view into the sort of poetic apprenticeship a promising young writer of verse could expect in the late sixteenth century, as well as into the dynamics of patronage during this era. The patronage system, which continues to some extent today through various private and public fellowships for artists and scholars, allowed individuals to pursue their artistic talents—even if, like Drayton, they were not independently wealthy—and was a major feature of the fine arts right up into the twentieth century. As Drayton's life shows, however, the patronage system also involved a good deal of currying favor, and favor won could always soon be lost again.

**The Peak of Popularity** Drayton's poetic promise is realized fully in *Englands Heroicall Epistles* (1597), his most popular work. The poem consists of eighteen letters in rhymed couplets exchanged between couples who played important roles in English history (for example, between Mary Tudor and Charles Brandon, and between Guilford Dudley and Lady Jane Grey). In 1598 and 1599 Drayton added to the collection, bringing the total number of epistles to twenty-four. He also intended *Englands Heroicall Epistles* as both a major bid for patronage and an effort to retain the patronage he then had. His earlier works had each contained one dedication, but this poem contains nine dedications, one for each set of epistles—and each aimed at potential new patrons. Drayton clearly remains most interested here, however, in retaining the patronage of Lucy, Countess of Bedford, and her husband, Edward Russell, Earl of Bedford.

**An Effort to Gain the King's Patronage** Prior to the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign, Drayton revised *Mortimeriados* as *The Barrons Wars* (1603). The Barrons Wars were fought first against the despotic King John (from 1215 to 1217) and then against Royalist forces led by Prince Edward I in 1246 (and lasting three years). Both wars reflected the rise of nonroyal interests in England, and the first resulted in the Magna Carta, considered by many the founding document for modern democracy. In seeking favor, if this is what he was doing, Drayton was certainly also risking royal displeasure with this allusion to the end of absolute monarchy in Britain. All the same, in 1603 Drayton also welcomed King James with a poem entitled *To the Majestie of King James*, and in

1604, probably also in hopes of gaining James's favor, he wrote the first of his divine poems, *Moyses in a Map of his Miracles*. James was known to enjoy theological debate and to favor biblical verse. These bids for the king's patronage were unsuccessful, however. Drayton never received and never again sought favor from the Jacobean monarch. He addressed no verse to James after *A Pean Triumphall* (1604), entered in the Stationers' Register on March 20.

**Losing Lucy's Favor** By the time James succeeded to the throne, Drayton had lost the favor of Lucy, Countess of Bedford for reasons unknown. On April 23, 1603, when James was welcomed and entertained at the Harington family estate, Samuel Daniel's *A Panegyrike congratulatory to the kings majestie* (1603) was the poetic work presented to the king—under Lucy's auspices. Lucy also arranged for Daniel to present his play *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* at Hampton Court on January 8, 1604, and also promoted Ben Jonson's efforts to gain recognition by the court.

As Daniel and Jonson became increasingly favored literary figures at court, Drayton must have realized that he had little chance of regaining Lucy's favor, but he cannot have foreseen how powerful the countess would in fact become; in the course of events, she came to be the second-most powerful woman at court, just after the queen herself. Once he did understand that he would be ignored by the court, Drayton launched a breathtaking attack on Lucy, reprinting *Idea* replete with calculated insults. He retains a shortened version of his complimentary references to Mary Sidney, but portrays Lucy as Selena, a faithless patroness.

**Losing Another Patron** In 1612 Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* appeared. The work, an attempt to preserve in verse the history and geography of Great Britain, was dedicated to James's heir, Prince Henry, who seemed to many the royal family member who most symbolized Elizabethan values. Drayton's bid for favor was successful this time, with Henry's household accounts showing grants of pensions of ten pounds to Drayton, but fate intervened: Prince Henry died on November 6, 1612.

**A Humble End** After a series of moderately, though not wildly, successful years, Drayton's final folio appeared in 1630 under the title of one of his finest poems, *The Muses Elizium*. The collection is dedicated to Edward Sackville, fourth Earl of Dorset. In his dedication Drayton says that the constancy of Sackville's favors since they first began "have now made me one of your family, and I am become happy in the title to be called Yours." This heightened rhetoric, however, should not be interpreted literally, since there is no evidence that Drayton received any more patronage from Dorset than did other poets such as John Donne, Jonson, and Robert Herrick.

His exaggerated style aside, Drayton's truthfulness in many matters earned him the respect of his contemporaries



even if it did not win him prosperity. Henry Peacham observed that “Honest Mr. Michael Drayton had about some five pounds lying by him at his death” in 1631, and the final inventory of his estate was reported by his brother Edmund to be a little more than twenty-four pounds. The antiquary William Fulman, however, described his funeral as impressive: “He dyed at his lodging in Fleet Street . . . the Gentlemen of the Four Innes of Court and others of note about the Town, attended his body to Westminster, reaching in order by two and two, from his Lodging almost to Standbridge.”

### Works in Literary Context

***Varied Styles and Themes on the Value and Death of Poetry*** Drayton experimented with a series of sub-genres including the pastoral, the sonnet sequence, and the minor epic. He related these efforts as repetitions of “Idea” in the title of each of the Idea works. Drayton also worked with mythological narratives and historical complaints. His writing was done not only with the intention of gaining patronage but to give vent to Drayton’s criticisms of the Jacobean court, the craft of poetry, and the destructive nature of having to secure patrons for his craft’s survival. In his 1593 *Idea. The Shepherds Garland, Fashioned in Nine Eglogs. Rowlands Sacrifice to the Nine Muses*, for example, Drayton devotes nearly a third of one eclogue to a scathing denunciation of how literary clientage can corrupt poetry.

***The Disappearance of the Heroic*** An intellectual heir of the humanists, Drayton believed in the tradition of *bonae litterae* (fine writing) and envisioned the poet as a spokesman for public values. Drayton’s images and diction—in *Rowlands Sacrifice to the Nine Muses*, for instance—emphasize the social function of poetry and its political importance. *The Muses Elizium* (1630), his last pastoral and critical statement on the craft of poetry, however, forecasts that true poetry would die out. He seems to have concluded that epic poetry could no longer be written with conviction since heroic values had disappeared from life and art. Drayton prophesied a bleak future for England and no future at all for the kind of poetry he had spent his life writing. Poets, he implied, would turn to romantic escape and satire. Biting satire filled with topical allusions—like *The Owle* (1604)—was apparently the disillusioned poet’s last resort. His one surviving portrait even depicts him as a satiric laureate: Represented as wearing the traditional laurel wreath of the poet in the frontispiece to the 1619 folio edition of his works, he is portrayed as frowning in disapproval.

### Works in Critical Context

The twentieth-century gentrification of Drayton had established the grounds for critical approaches to his work. Poems that did not fit the mild and inoffensive image constructed for Drayton were overlooked or dismissed. His numerous assaults on title and privilege were ignored because they did not ring true as the docile

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Drayton’s famous contemporaries include:

**Miguel de Cervantes** (1547–1616): The Spanish novelist and poet considered to have written the first novel, and one of the most important literary works in history: *Don Quixote* (1605).

**Galileo Galilei** (1564–1642): An Italian physicist, mathematician, philosopher, and astronomer who was instrumental in the scientific revolution.

**Mary Queen of Scots** (1542–1587): Queen of the monarchy of Scotland, she was also queen consort in France and is best known for her imprisonment and execution for treason.

**William Shakespeare** (1564–1616): An English (Elizabethan) playwright and poet, he is typically described as the greatest writer of all time.

**Robert Naunton** (1563–1635): An English politician and writer. His valuable account of Queen Elizabeth’s reign, published as *Fragmenta Regalia, or Observations on the late Queen Elizabeth, her Times and Favourites*, (1653) was still in manuscript form when he died.

reflections of a “goodly page.” This has shifted in recent times, however, as scholars have come to see the thunderclouds bristling throughout Drayton’s many meditations on writing and on the patronage system in England.

***Englands Heroicall Epistles* (1597)** *Englands Heroicall Epistles* was the most popular of Drayton’s works in its own time. In verse, Drayton successfully interweaved fiction with history while contributing to a genre that had as yet attracted few English practitioners. The work addressed themes of political importance to Drayton’s audience. In the 1597 version each of the paired epistles involves at least one monarch, sometimes two, and each set of epistles after the first two concerns the deposition of a monarch (reigns of Edward II, Richard II, Henry VI) or a struggle over the succession.

Recent critics have suggested that these letters must be seen not only as comments on history, but as comments on themselves as well. Georgia Brown, for example, argues in *Redefining Elizabethan Literature* that they “are not only forms of commemoration, they are also forms of self-dramatization which draw parallels between the content of the poem and the content, or personality, of their author.” In another vein, Stanley MacKenzie observes that *Englands Heroicall Epistles’* Mistress Shore is “a woman who understands the transforming power of literacy and uses it to negotiate freedom,” making her an “unforgiveable threat to patriarchal stability.” Gone now is our vision of the pleasantly dull, middle-class Drayton,

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who also wrote about the craft and pressures of writing itself:

- Ars Poetica* (c. 18 B.C.E.), a nonfiction piece by Horace. In this treatise, Horace explicates the "art of poetry."  
 "Ars Poetica" (1925), a poem by Archibald MacLeish. In this poem about poetry, the speaker suggests that a poem "should not mean / but be."  
 "Ars Poetica?" (1961), a poem by Czeslaw Milosz. In yet another version, this poet adds his attempts to define poetry.  
 "American Poetry" (1963), a poem by Louis Simpson. In this brief but vividly wrought poem, the speaker defines poetry.  
 "The Author to Her Book" (1678), a poem by Anne Bradstreet. In this piece, the poet personifies her book, likening it to a "brat" and the "ill-formed offspring of her feeble brain."  
 "Theme for English B" (1951), a poem by Langston Hughes. In this poem, the speaker responds to a vague writing assignment.

replaced with an understanding of the poet as subtly engaged with and challenging to the gender, property, and poetic structures of his time.

### Responses to Literature

1. The practice of patronage in the arts has been common for centuries. In Drayton's time, his life depended upon finding patrons to finance his poetry. Explore this practice further, first by finding examples of other writers, poets, and artists who relied on it in Great Britain, then by considering the practice as it existed in other cultures and periods—Japanese, the Church, the National Endowment of the Arts today.
2. You may be an artist or writer who will be considering how to obtain funding soon, or you may imagine you will be. Come up with a "service" or "sales pitch" and then consider a patron capable of supporting your art. (Oprah Winfrey is famous for taking solicitations for her donations.) Write a "dedication" that will win your potential patron's favor.
3. Write a letter or dedication of thanks to someone who has supported you. The support can be financial, emotional, or otherwise; and the person you thank can be a relative or even yourself (if applicable). Try writing in the style of Michael Drayton, using excessive flair.
4. Look at the way that *Englands Heroicall Epistles* combines history with fiction, and compare the techniques used there to those of a modern piece of

art that seeks to achieve the same aims. What general human needs and drives, if any, do both pieces enact through their fictional negotiations of history? Compare concrete techniques or details from the two pieces.

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## John Dryden

BORN: 1631, Aldwinkle, Northamptonshire, England

DIED: 1700, London, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Poetry, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Of Dramatick Poesie* (1668)

*Absalom and Achitophel* (1681)

*A Song for St. Cecilia's Day* (1687)

*The Works of Virgil* (1697)





John Dryden Dryden, John, painting. The Library of Congress.

## Overview

Regarded by many scholars as the father of modern English poetry and criticism, John Dryden dominated literary life in England during the last four decades of the seventeenth century. Although initially famous for his plays, Dryden is today highly regarded for his critical writings as well as his satirical and didactic poems. Throughout his lengthy, varied career, Dryden fashioned a vital, concise, and refined language that served as a foundation for the writers of English prose and verse who followed him.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Childhood during English Civil War** Dryden was born August 9, 1631, in Aldwinkle, Northamptonshire, England, to Erasmus Dryden and Mary Pickering, both moderate Puritans. He grew up during the seven-year-long English Civil War, a conflict between the Puritans, who wanted to abolish the monarchy, and the Royalists, who supported the monarchy. A royal scholarship allowed Dryden to attend Westminster School, where he received a classical education and published his first poem.

The Puritans came to power under Oliver Cromwell in 1649, deposing the monarchy and executing King Charles I not a half mile from where Dryden was study-

ing. It is believed that Dryden's lifelong concern for political stability was a result of growing up during the war. In 1650, Dryden began studying at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he earned a bachelor of arts degree. Next, it appears he worked for Cromwell's government, probably in the Office of Latin Secretary along with poets John Milton and Andrew Marvell.

**Published First Poems** Following Cromwell's death and during the short-lived government of Cromwell's son Richard, Dryden published *Heroique Stanza* (1658), a group of verses that portray Cromwell as the architect of a great new age. In the following years, Dryden continued to publish politically oriented poems, including the notable *Astraea Redux* (1660). This poem celebrated Charles II's 1660 return from exile and restoration to the English throne. Dryden's change of position instigated attacks in later years by his literary enemies, who charged him with political inconsistency and selfish motivation.

**Popular Playwright** Dryden next began a career as a playwright. In 1663, the same year that he married Lady Elizabeth Howard, Dryden's first play, *The Wild Gallant*, was produced, followed by *The Rival Ladies* (perhaps acted in 1663), and *The Indian-Queen* (performed in 1664), a collaboration with his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Howard. *The Indian Emperour* (1665), Dryden's sequel to *The Indian Queen*, represents his first entirely original play and was written wholly in rhymed couplets. It was extremely popular.

A few weeks after *The Indian Emperor* opened, the Second Anglo-Dutch War began (a conflict between England and Holland over commercial interests in Africa, eventually won by the Dutch but with the English gaining the American territory that would become New York). The bubonic plague (a then common infectious bacterial disease that attacks the lungs and lymph nodes and is spread by overcrowding and poor sanitation), which had begun to spread during the same winter, also ravaged London the following spring. Because of these situations, theaters were closed by royal order in June 1665, and they remained so until December of 1666.

Dryden's first important piece of criticism, *Of Dramatick Poesie*, was published in 1667, but probably written in 1665–1666, when he moved with his family to the country to avoid the plague. Dryden's essay, which examines and challenges theatrical notions, remains the best-known example of his prose, primarily because it is his only freestanding essay not written to commemorate a specific occasion. He soon returned to writing plays and also took on an important post for his country.

**Named Poet Laureate** In 1668, Dryden became poet laureate of England. Although he had yet to write any of the poems for which he is chiefly remembered today, he had done all the right things, in all the right ways, to make himself the logical choice for the post. By

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Dryden's famous contemporaries include:

**Nell Gwyn** (c. 1650–1687): One of the first English actresses, Gwyn was a famous mistress of King Charles II.

**Louis Jolliet** (1645–1700): Along with Father Jacques Marquette, this Canadian explorer was the first to explore and map the Mississippi River.

**Andrew Marvell** (1621–1678): This English poet of the metaphysical school is best known today for his poem "To His Coy Mistress" (1681).

**John Milton** (1608–1674): Milton, a Protestant English poet, is famous for the blank-verse epic *Paradise Lost* (1667).

**Rembrandt van Rijn** (1606–1669): This Dutch painter and etcher sought to achieve, in his words, "the greatest and most natural movement."

**Joost van den Vondel** (1587–1679): A Dutch playwright, van den Vondel advocated religious tolerance, as he was a convert from Protestantism to Catholicism himself.

1668, he was England's leading playwright—in 1667 alone, five of his plays were in production on the London stage. He showed himself to be a loyal defender of the court in *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), a poem about the naval campaign during the Second Anglo-Dutch War and the Great Fire of London, which had destroyed much of London in 1666. The poem demonstrates his skills at political argument and effectively defends the court against those who blamed disaster on royal immorality. Dryden even lent the king five hundred pounds—a large sum, considering that the stipend for poet laureate was one hundred pounds per year.

Dryden wrote his longest piece of literary criticism, *Of Dramatick Poesie*, in 1667 as well. Shortly thereafter, he reconsidered his earlier arguments in favor of rhymed play and adopted blank verse, or unrhymed metered poetry. *All for Love; or, The World Well Lost* (1677), adapted from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and written in blank verse, was a great success and solidified Dryden's reputation as the most talented and accomplished writer of the time. In fact, *All for Love*, performed in 1677, was so highly regarded that it displaced the original Shakespearean play from the English stage for a century.

Dryden was part owner of the Bridges Street Theatre, which was destroyed by a fire on January 25, 1672. He had to contribute toward the construction of a new theater and scene house, and his company was at a serious disadvantage while waiting for those facilities to be constructed. During this time, Dryden wrote a rhyming

adaptation of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* titled *The State of Innocence* (1673), but it was never performed.

**Satire in Later Poems** The Popish Plot (1678–81), a thwarted attempt by the Earl of Shaftesbury and others to exclude Charles's Catholic brother, James, from the English throne, provided Dryden with the topic for what critics consider his greatest work, *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681). This poem is a satirical attack on Shaftesbury and his confederates. This work launched a phase of satirical and didactic verse that directly influenced the development of Augustan poetry in the next century, especially that of Alexander Pope. Dryden's first major satire was followed in 1682 by *Mac Flecknoe*, a mock-heroic poem. Related to *Absalom and Achitophel* in tone, *Mac Flecknoe* displays Dryden's mastery of word order, rhythm, and cunning verbal attack. The same year, he debuted a shorter, more serious satiric poem titled *The Medall*, which again was aimed at Shaftesbury, who escaped sentencing for treason.

As political and religious matters repeatedly overlapped in Dryden's time, an era much concerned with the question of whether Protestant or Roman Catholic monarchs were the legitimate rulers of Britain, it is not surprising that Dryden also began to address religious issues during this period of national turmoil. *Religio Laici; or, A Layman's Faith* (1682) appeared when new plots to assassinate the king were being formed. In this poem, Dryden proclaimed a compromise between Anglicans and the Roman Catholic belief in the absolute authority of the pope, clearly expressing the king's stance in favor of religious toleration.

**Catholic Convert** In 1685, James II ascended the English throne and soon enacted a declaration of toleration, placing many of his sympathizers in high government positions. Within the first year of James's reign, Dryden converted from Protestantism to Catholicism. Once he converted, the man who had argued for the Anglican cause in *Religio Laici* daringly published a poem arguing for the Catholic cause, *The Hind and the Panther* (1687). Written in beast-fable form, the poem presents a long theological debate between a milk-white hind, representing the Roman Church, and a spotted panther, representing the Anglican Church. As he might have expected, his enemies gleefully noticed the conflicting positions taken in these poems, and, although *Religio Laici* was greeted by public indifference when first published, it was resurrected and used as a weapon against him. When James was deposed in 1688, Dryden refused to swear allegiance to the new government; consequently, he lost his position as poet laureate.

During his last years, Dryden wrote the widely anthologized odes *A Song for St. Cecilia's Day* (1687) and *Alexander's Feast* (1697), in addition to completing five more plays. Primarily, however, he concentrated on translation, completing *The Works of Virgil* (1697) and *Fables Ancient and Modern* (1700). In all of his

translations, Dryden's goal was to paraphrase rather than reproduce while still capturing the individuality of the original work. Linguistic purists have harshly criticized Dryden for continually changing word order and narrative sense. Yet his translation of Virgil's works, particularly the *Aeneid*, is regarded as a monumental undertaking that, if not always exact, is nevertheless largely representative of the Latin original. *Fables Ancient and Modern* is similarly regarded as a lasting work of translation.

Dryden died in London on May 1, 1700, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

### Works in Literary Context

Dryden was an influential poet and playwright in his time, and his works often reflected the tumultuous period in British history in which he lived. His most long-lasting contribution, however, may be in his criticism, as he played a key role in developing the modern English process of examining literature. In all his literary productions, Dryden is both the conservative, ever concerned with the past, and the innovator, looking ahead to the future of English literature.

**Criticism** John Dryden's plays include prologues, prefaces, and dedications in which he analyzes the works of John Fletcher, Francis Beaumont, Ben Jonson, Shakespeare, and even himself while discussing the English theater, the difficulties of representing life on the stage, and the merits and drawbacks of rhyme. In so doing, Dryden began the English tradition of practical criticism. While critics of his time were preoccupied with issues of morality, immorality, and uplifting the reader or audience, Dryden wrote objectively and systematically about the literature itself. Through a natural, conversational prose style, he discussed works in the context of literary tradition, generic form, technical innovation, and effectiveness of presentation, all of which became the standard for literary critical investigations.

In Dryden's satirical and didactic poems, he created the extended form of objective analysis that has come to characterize most modern criticism. In his satire, he displayed an irrepressible wit and forceful line of argument that later satirists adopted as their model. Samuel Johnson, who first called Dryden the father of English criticism, considered him the English poet who crystallized the potential for beauty and majesty in the English language: According to Johnson, "[Dryden] found it brick, and he left it marble."

**Influence** Thus as a critic, he developed a combination of methods that proved useful to critics hundreds of years later. Although his major works are not as widely known today as those of some of his contemporaries, his influence on English literature extends beyond the fame of any particular piece. Dryden dominated the Restoration period, and his language and ideas have served as a foundation for the writers of English prose and verse for

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Dryden based his *Fables* on collections by Ovid, Boccaccio, and Chaucer. Fables generally have a moral attached and make their point by featuring animals, plants, and other nonhuman subjects. Here are some collections of fables from around the world:

*Ancient Chinese Fables* (1996), a compilation of fables by Lie Ze, translated by Yang Xianyi. This collection includes more than one hundred Chinese fables from the fourth century B.C.E. to the seventeenth century C.E..

*An Argosy of Fables* (2004), a collection of fables by Frederic Taber Cooper. Originally compiled in 1921, this wide-ranging collection includes ancient and contemporary fables from Greece, India, Asia, and the Americas.

*Classic Tales and Fables for Children* (2001), a compilation of stories by Leo Tolstoy. The nineteenth-century Russian novelist famous for the novel *War and Peace* presents free translations of Aesop's fables and Hindu fables, as well as an original tale.

*Moral Fables and Other Poems* (1995), by Giovanni Meli, translated into English by Gaetano Cipolla. Fables from Sicily and Italy are translated with the Italian and English versions facing each other.

centuries, making Dryden one of the greatest forces in English literary history.

### Works in Critical Context

Dryden reached a level of achievement rarely equaled or surpassed in English literature. Frequent comparisons with his most celebrated literary descendant, Alexander Pope, almost unanimously affirm Dryden's superiority in metrical innovation, imagination, and style, though Pope's works are more widely known.

**The Dramas** Of all Dryden's works, his dramas have been accorded the least acclaim since his death. With the exception of a few of his more than thirty plays, such as *All for Love* and *Marriage-a-la-Mode*, his productions have vanished from the English stage. This, according to critics, is perhaps largely due to his devotion to the heroic play, a form that attained its greatest expression through him but radically declined in public appeal. In addition, Dryden's comedies, although filled with witty repartee and many memorable characters, have been found lacking in truly comic scenes or effective explorations of human emotion. Not until the early twentieth century, when studies by T. S. Eliot and Mark Van Doren, along with Montague Summers's six-volume collection of Dryden's *Dramatic Works* appeared, did Dryden's plays receive favorable reassessments.

## Responses to Literature

1. Do you know anyone who has converted to a different religion? Do you think you would ever do so? Why or why not?
2. Write your own fable for today's world. What point do you want to make? Remember to use nonhumans as your characters.
3. Read a satirical news story on The Onion Web site ([www.theonion.com](http://www.theonion.com)). Research mainstream news coverage of that story or issue. Write an essay analyzing what specifically is satirized, why, and how.
4. Research the Great Fire of London. Create a map showing London before the fire and after it. What neighborhoods were most affected? How long did it take to rebuild?

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## Maureen Duffy

BORN: 1933, Worthing, Sussex, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Microcosm* (1966)

*The Erotic World of Faery* (1972)

*All Heaven in a Rage* (1973)



Maureen Duffy Duffy, Maureen, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

## Overview

A poet, playwright, novelist, and historian, writer Maureen Duffy reflects within her work the loneliness experienced by those living on the fringes of a judgmental and sometimes hostile society. Her characters—lesbians, the homeless, political radicals, displaced intellectuals—are frustrated by unfulfilled aspirations and unmet emotional, sexual, or other needs. Novels such as *The Microcosm* (1966), *All Heaven in a Rage* (1973), and *Illuminations* (1991) exhibit deft characterization, while nonfiction works such as the 1972 Freudian literary study *The Erotic World of Faery* also speak to the author's creative talents. Duffy has been praised by critics for her ability to create vivid characters and evoke a sense of place, and her work has been compared favorably to that of Virginia Woolf.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

### *An Absent Mother and a Tough Childhood*

Maureen Patricia Duffy was born on October 21, 1933, in Worthing, Sussex, to Cahia Patrick Duffy and Grace Rose Wright. Her mother suffered from tuberculosis, and Duffy has acknowledged the political and psychological effects of her mother's prolonged absences in sanatoriums. Duffy was educated at Trowbridge High School for Girls in Wiltshire and the Sarah Bonnell High School

for Girls. She studied English at King's College, London, and after earning her bachelor of arts degree with honors in 1956, she taught for two years in Italy. She wrote from an early age and acted in school plays. At the age of seventeen she was offered a place at the Old Vic Drama School, and during her university years she performed in plays by William Shakespeare and Sean O'Casey.

***Establishing a Writing Career with the Royal Court Theatre*** Duffy entered her career during the beginning of the "women's liberation" or "feminist" movement of the 1960s that called for equal legal rights and the right to make choices about family planning. Although she would have encountered sexism in her work, proximity to the women's liberation movement was clearly catalytic to Duffy's career. Unwilling to be confined to female roles as an actor, she concentrated on writing, and in her final year at King's College she wrote "Pearson," a modern adaptation of William Langland's fourteenth-century poem *Piers Plowman*, set in a contemporary factory during a strike. *Pearson* was submitted to Kenneth Tynan, the drama critic for *The Observer*, who was running a competition to find new playwrights. Though *Pearson* did not win the competition, Duffy was invited to join one of the writers' groups at the Royal Court Theatre under the direction of George Devine and William Gaskill. *Pearson* was performed in 1962 as *The Lay-Off* (the title was changed by the producer), but it remains unpublished. She won the City of London Festival Playwright's Award in 1962 for this work. After the publication of her first novel, *That's How It Was* (1962), her writing career was established. This period was an exciting time in her life, during which she was introduced to experimental theater forms, improvisation, mask work, and discussion/evaluation groups. In 1969 her play *Rites* was produced at the Jeannetta Cochrane Theatre (a branch of the National Theatre) under the direction of Joan Plowright, who recognized the lack of parts for women in the theater. It was then produced at the Old Vic and, subsequently, internationally. It remains Duffy's most performed play to date.

***Leadership Roles*** Duffy's reputation as a writer and critic developed significantly during the 1970s and 1980s as she continued to write poems and novels as well as plays. She was a founder of the Writers Action Group in 1972 and served as joint chairman of the Writers' Guild of Great Britain from 1977 to 1978 and president from 1985 to 1989. She was chairman of the Greater London Arts Literature Panel from 1979 to 1981 and of the British Copyright Council, Authors Lending and Copyright Society in 1982. She received Arts Council bursaries in 1963, 1966, and 1975, as well as a Society of Authors traveling scholarship in 1985. She also became a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature (1985). Her keen interest in literary figures, especially female ones, influenced much of her writing in the 1970s and beyond.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Duffy's famous contemporaries include:

- Martin Luther King Jr.** (1929–1968): American civil rights leader who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 and was assassinated in 1968.
- Rita Mae Brown** (1944–): American feminist activist and author of a popular series of mystery novels featuring a cat, Mrs. Murphy, as its star detective.
- Philip Pullman** (1946–): British fantasy writer of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy and, like Duffy, a supporter of the British Humanist Association.
- Elton John** (1947–): British singer, songwriter, and composer who has sold hundreds of millions of albums and won an Academy Award for his work on the music for the Disney animated film *The Lion King*.
- Doris Lessing** (1919–): British author and winner of the 2007 Nobel Prize in Literature, Lessing is respected for her visionary works and powerful engagement with the female experience.

***A Prolific Period: 1973–1995*** Between the years of 1973 and 1995, Duffy's artistic efforts were more fully concentrated on the writing of her poems and novels. She was also politically active and involved in environmental and feminist movements. During this time period, she published eighteen books, including novels, essays, and play collections.

Maureen Duffy's writing, in the many genres she has attempted, reflects both her involvement in contemporary society and her uneasy place in the English social system, as a socialist, a lesbian, and an artist aware of her illegitimate and working-class origins. Her work, with its ambitious range, its versatility, and its vitality of language, is impressive. Her best novels are characterized by their brilliancy of style, their elegance of structural form, and their ability to suggest questions that haunt the mind. Several of her novels have received both critical and popular acclaim in Great Britain and the United States.

### Works in Literary Context

Duffy's work is marked by an attempt at realism—the accurate portrayal of both the physical and emotional world of her characters. Duffy, however, utilizes this realism in order to explore the questions and lives of those at the fringes of "acceptable society." As such, Duffy employs her considerable descriptive skills to dive deep into the lives of a group of lesbian women in her novel *The Microcosm* (1966), and in other novels, she explores questions about sexual conventions and their relationship to other social restrictions. Duffy's work,



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Duffy's works are largely concerned with the place of women in society. Here are some other works that deal with this same theme:

*Pride and Prejudice* (1813), a novel by Jane Austen. In this novel, Austen paints a sharply humorous portrait of the limited opportunities available to women in early nineteenth century England.

*Middlemarch* (1874), a novel by George Eliot. In this book, the author—whose real name was Mary Ann Evans—offers a complex portrait of the residents of a fictional English town, notably Dorothea Brooke, an ambitious young woman with grand plans that her husband does not support.

*A Room of One's Own* (1929), a nonfiction piece by Virginia Woolf. In this book-length essay, Woolf argues that female authors will be able to find success only by becoming financially independent and by creating a private work space in which to practice their art.

then, is a continuation of the work of Virginia Woolf, who is famous for, among other things, analyzing the place creative women have in society and for suggesting alternatives to the conventions that restrict artistic genius in women. Woolf's ideas can be examined in texts like *A Room of One's Own*.

**Realism** Realism is the touchstone of Duffy's style; like many other observers of working-class life, she is at her best when she relies on accurate, detailed reportage and at her weakest when tempted by sentiment. *The Paradox Players* (1967) is an example of her writing at its most compelling. It describes a man's retreat from society to live for some months in a boat moored on the Thames. The physical realities of cold, snow, rats, and flooding occupy him continually and the hardship brings him peace. He is a novelist, suffering from the hazards peculiar to that profession and has some pertinent comments to make about the vulnerability of the writer. "When I saw the reviews I could have cut my throat. You see they're very kind to first novels for some mistaken reason but when the poor bastard follows it up with a second and they see he really means it they tear its guts out." The experience of winter on the river restores his faith in his own ability to survive.

**Lesbianism** Duffy's observations are acute, her use of dialogue witty and direct; this authenticity is complemented by an interest in the bizarre, the fantastic. Her best-known book uses these qualities of realism to great effect in a study of lesbian society which is both informa-

tive and original. *The Microcosm* begins and ends in a club where the central characters meet to dance, dress up, and escape from the necessity of "all the week wearing a false face." Their fantasies are played out in front of the jukebox; then the narrative follows each woman back into her disguise, her social role. Steve is Miss Stephens, a schoolmistress; Cathy is a bus conductress; Matt works in a garage. Their predicament as individuals, the author suggests, extends beyond the interest of their own minority group. A plea is made for tolerance, understanding, and that respect without which the human spirit must perish. "Society isn't a simple organism with one nucleus and a fringe of little feet, it's an infinitely complex structure and if you try to suppress any part . . . you diminish, you mutilate the whole." *Wounds* (1969) and *Love Child* (1971) reaffirm this belief.

**Freudian Psychology, Greek Mythology, and Philosophy** In other novels Duffy explores the relationships between sex, gender, and the larger society. In *Wounds*, for example, recurring scenes featuring a nameless couple making love are punctuated by longer episodes involving a variety of people in modern England who face painful restrictions on their lifestyle. This contrasting of sex with societal limitations sets up a number of questions about the power of love in the modern world and the relationships between personal and public concerns. In *Love Child* Duffy relates the story of Kit, a child of indeterminate sex who takes a deadly revenge on his/her mother's lover. Combining elements of Freudian psychology and Greek mythology, *Love Child* examines a world where gender is subordinate to wealth, power, and the kind of permissiveness that sanctions even the most destructive behavior. A similarly gender-ambiguous narrator is found in *Londoners* (1983), the story of Al, a struggling writer in a London of predatory inhabitants who dreams of writing a film script about the French poet François Villon. Al's essential loneliness and isolation amid the incessant activity of the bustling metropolis, brought on by his/her vocation as a writer as well as by his/her sexual preferences, confronts the issue of private versus public behavior and how sexual identity can serve to marginalize people from the larger society. As she was one of the first homosexual female authors to "come out" to the public, she continues to be hailed as a forerunner in the struggle for homosexual law reform and influence writers who incorporate related themes into their work. Accordingly, Duffy's work is often included in anthologies of feminist influence.

### Works in Critical Context

Duffy has been praised by critics for her ability to create vivid characters and evoke a sense of place. Nonetheless, critics often fault her novels for lack of structural cohesiveness. In all, her work has received warm critical reception, including recognition for her talents in the form of a number of literary awards. Indeed, some critics think

highly enough of her work to compare her to the imitable Virginia Woolf. As one critic for *Time* noted, “both have the knack of tuning the physical world precisely to the pitch of the characters’ emotions. Miss Duffy has a special talent for describing landscape, seascape and weather.”

***Praise for Poetry and Clarity of Vision*** Citing Duffy’s “passionate interest in history and in language,” Shena Mackay commended the versatile author’s oeuvre in the *Times Literary Supplement*. With numerous books to her credit that span the genres of history, literary criticism, poetry, and fiction, Duffy’s later works, according to Mackay, “should consolidate her reputation as a writer, an imaginative poet of the city and someone who is committed to the cause of both human and animal rights.” *Contemporary Women Poets* essayist Geoff Sadler echoed such praise, noting of Duffy’s poetry that “the variety of subjects covered, and the pure, intense clarity of her vision lift her work above the ordinary, giving to it the quality of a personal testament.”

***The Paradox Players*** Duffy’s ability to handle description and develop characters is perhaps most apparent in her fourth novel, *The Paradox Players*. Taking place on a houseboat floating on the Thames during a winter in the 1960s, *The Paradox Players* details the voluntary isolation of the writer Sym. Thinking to abandon his “square” lifestyle, which includes a wife and child, Sym buys an old, forty-foot boat called “Mimosa” and attempts to keep it afloat while also endeavoring to “find a point to work from” in his writing. A critic for the *New Yorker* writes that “no one character in . . . [*The Paradox Players*] is outstanding, although each human being and each animal is impeccably drawn and treated with thorough understanding. As a study in gray, animated and given sad meaning by the slow movement of gray figures, gray weather, and fateful gray light, her book is a work of art.”

***All Heaven in a Rage*** Duffy’s 1973 novel *All Heaven in a Rage*, published in England as *I Want to Go to Moscow*, reflects one of the author’s personal concerns: the proper treatment of animals. The novel’s main character, an incarcerated felon named Jarvis Chuff, is sprung from prison by a group of antivivisectionist vegetarians who promise to give Chuff his freedom if he will help them free a number of animals from captivity. Calling the novel a “romp” on the order of writer P. G. Wodehouse, *New York Times Book Review* critic Paul Theroux added that *All Heaven in a Rage* features a plot that “is at best only amusing and at worst quite preposterous.” Maintaining that the work shows a lack of focus, Anatole Broyard added in the *New York Times* that Duffy’s seventh novel contains “a topical message delivered without urgency, a romance that is well above average in its arbitrariness, a teetering between suspense fiction and morality tale . . . an intermittent flaring up of fine writing.

The book,” Broyard concluded, “consistently refuses to settle on one level and stay there.”

## Responses to Literature

1. Duffy’s work has often been praised for its exceptional portrayal of character but has been faulted for its uncertain and, at times, unrealistic plots. Read *All Heaven in a Rage*. Respond to the analysis that Duffy’s characters are better developed than her plots as it relates to *All Heaven in a Rage*. Make sure to cite specific passages to support your response.
2. One of Duffy’s best characteristics as a writer is her ability to capture the details of a character and a place that make that character or place feel real. Realism in writing is based largely on the writer’s ability to capture physical details in the text. In order to improve your ability to capture physical detail, perform a short study of a physical object. Look at it closely, feel it, and hold it in your hand; pay attention to its temperature, the texture on the surface of it, whether it has a distinct smell or not, and other sensory details. Then, in a paragraph or two, describe that object as vividly as you possibly can.
3. Duffy began her writing career in the middle of the Woman’s Rights Movement. Using the Internet and the library, research this important time in history. Then, in a short essay, discuss how the movement and Duffy’s writing complement one another. Make sure to cite specific examples from Duffy’s work to support your response.
4. Duffy is sometimes compared to author Virginia Woolf, particularly in her descriptions that relate her characters’ internal landscapes to the outside world. Find a descriptive passage in one of Duffy’s novels, and compare it to a descriptive passage by Woolf from her novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. What similarities do you see between the two writers’s techniques? How do they differ? Based on your limited experience, do you think the comparison between the two writers is valid? Why or why not?

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## ■ Maurice Duggan

BORN: 1922, Auckland, New Zealand

DIED: 1974, Auckland, New Zealand

NATIONALITY: New Zealander

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Immanuel's Land: Stories* (1956)

*Falter Tom and the Water Boy* (1957)

*Summer in the Gravel Pit: Stories* (1965)

*O'Leary's Orchard, and Other Stories* (1970)

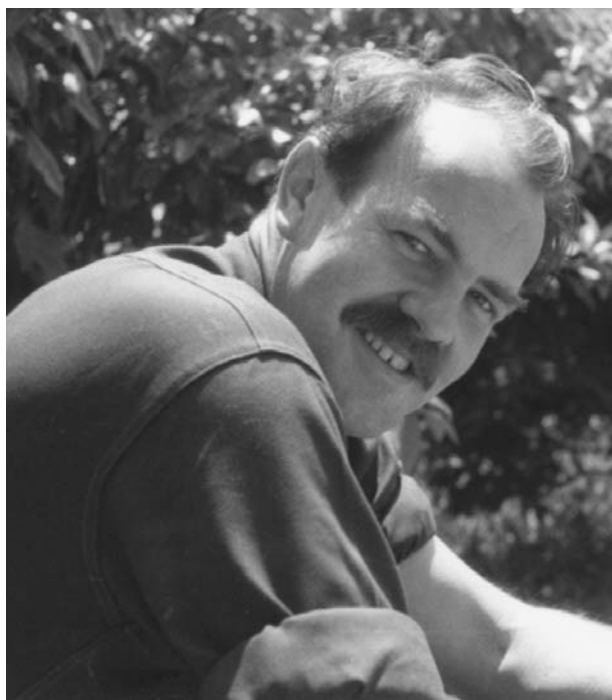
*The Fabulous McFanes, and Other Children's Stories* (1974)

### Overview

New Zealand fiction writer Maurice Duggan is best known for his short fiction, often targeted at children. His stories focus on carefully observed physical detail and realistic environments and feature glum characters. Among his best-known works is the award-winning *Falter Tom and the Water Boy* (1957).

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Early Losses** Duggan was born in Auckland, New Zealand, on November 25, 1922, the eldest child of Irish immigrant parents, Robert and Mary Duggan. Seven



Maurice Duggan Eric Lee-Johnson / Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

months after the birth of her fourth child, Duggan's mother died of heart failure. Her sudden death devastated the young Duggan.

As a child, Duggan attended St. Benedict's Convent School and St. Joseph's Convent School. He was an unremarkable student whose main interest was sports, not literature. When he was eighteen years old, Duggan was diagnosed with osteomyelitis—a bacterial inflammation of bone and bone marrow. Duggan's leg had to be amputated just below the knee. The amputation ended his all-absorbing interest in sports and prevented him from following his friends into the army during World War II. While the war had begun in Europe as a conflict between Nazi Germany and the allies fighting that country's aspirations toward dominance, there was also a theater of conflict in the Pacific, as the Allies, including the United States and Great Britain, fought against Japan. New Zealand fought on the side of the Allies, and New Zealanders served in both theaters with distinction. The war, however, did not reach New Zealand itself.

**Writing Years** The amputation changed Duggan's life and seemed to have spurred his desire to write. By 1944, he had made contact with Frank Sargeson, New Zealand's most famous writer of the time, and the older man soon became his mentor. Duggan evokes this period movingly in "Beginnings," which appeared in the magazine *Landfall* in 1966 as part of a series on how New Zealanders started writing. Duggan's first efforts, though encouraged by Sargeson, were less than remarkable in their overblown use of language and a disregard for convention. Yet as the young writer evolved, his stories became highly stylized and sophisticated. Duggan made his breakthrough with "Six Place Names and a Girl" (1949), published in *Landfall*.

**Attempts at Writing a Novel** In 1950, Duggan traveled to England, a country still recovering, like much of the world, from the end of World War II a few years earlier. During his two years in Europe, he attempted to write a full-length book. Parts of the uncompleted work were eventually refashioned into short stories, including "Guardian," "In Youth Is Pleasure" (1953), and "Race Day." At the same time that Duggan was writing these stories featuring the Irish Lenihan family, he was also working on a travel diary titled "Voyage." The three-part story features his journey by ship to England, a holiday through Italy, and his adventures in Spain. It was widely admired when published in New Zealand in *Landfall* in the early 1950s.

For the next few years Duggan seems, at least in retrospect, to have been trying to bring the richness of his style into the New Zealand realist tradition, with stories such as "The Wits of Willie Graves" and "Blues for Miss Laverty" (1960). "Blues for Miss Laverty" was written during Duggan's year as Robert Burns Fellow at Otago University, and it is during this fertile period that he produced two long monologues that effectively pushed the New Zealand short story out of its social-realist rut.

**Decreased Output** After “Along Rideout Road that Summer” (1963), a story which retains many of the themes of conventional New Zealand fiction, in the remaining fourteen years of his life, Duggan completed only a handful of stories. “O’Leary’s Orchard” (1963) and “An Appetite for Flowers” (1967) each attracted great attention when it appeared. Duggan died on November 11, 1974, in Auckland. “The Magsman Miscellany,” which was published in 1975, one year after Duggan’s death, caused a sensation with its skillful use of form and its relevant story of a writer’s relationship with fiction.

### Works in Literary Context

Duggan was encouraged by Sargeson though he never really adopted his mentor’s colloquial style. From the beginning, Duggan’s early stories, such as “Sunbrow” and “Notes on an Abstract Arachnid,” displayed wordiness and a lack of interest in conventional forms. His first attempts were weakened by what Duggan himself described as “a habit of rhetoric,” but as he developed, his stories showed a stylishness and sophistication previously unknown in New Zealand fiction. “Six Place Names and a Girl,” to which Sargeson contributed the title, proved a breakthrough because of this style—with its almost minimal plot and its brief, evocative descriptions of areas on the Hauraki Plains. At the time of its publication, its one-word sentences and composite words seemed technically very daring.

**Influences** With some allowance for artistic license, many of the events in his stories mirror Duggan’s own early life. These works also inspired by his mentors include pieces that further show the influence of James Joyce. In Duggan’s Lenihan stories—“Guardian,” “In Youth Is Pleasure,” and “Race Day” for example—there is the clear influence of Joyce’s *Dubliners*. Yet the Lenihan stories are some of the finest series written by a New Zealander.

**Dark Themes** Duggan employed a stark style in his work through the 1950s. “The Deposition” and “A Small Story” are typical stories of this period—written in a rigorous, spare prose style, with the motif of the gate that the children swing on reflecting the futility of all action.

Such stories also point to Duggan’s bleak outlook, reflected in many of his underlying themes. “Riley’s Handbook,” for example, consists of the ravings of an artist named Fowler who has escaped his wife and family to become a bar-man and caretaker in a sprawling rural hotel. His attempt to revise his identity requires a new name, Riley, and even more. Riley forms a relationship with Myra, another worker in the hotel, and rails bitterly against the absurdity of both his former and adopted lives. The story’s atmosphere of utter despair would be hard to take were it not for Duggan’s unique skills. There is a comic exuberance of language, a sense of reveling in

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Duggan’s famous contemporaries include:

**Carl Sandburg** (1878–1967) Famed American poet who also wrote children’s tales, including a study of Abraham Lincoln.

**César Chávez** (1927–1993): A Mexican American farm-worker, he was also a labor leader and civil rights activist who cofounded the National Farm Workers Association.

**Philip Larkin** (1922–1985): English poet who gained attention when he turned down a poet laureateship. He was deemed by readers as his nation’s best-loved poet.

**Martha Gellhorn** (1908–1998) American journalist, novelist, impassioned liberal and glamorous friend of the famous, who was also the third wife of Ernest Hemingway.

**James W. Tate** (1875–1922): English-born American pianist, composer, songwriter, and accompanist, who created popular pantomimes and revues.

melancholy, and the skill with which the story’s characters are drawn.

### Works in Critical Context

Despite the scarcity of Duggan’s output he has been ranked with Katherine Mansfield and Frank Sargeson as one of New Zealand’s greatest exponents of short fiction. Several stories by Duggan have been widely admired for their virtuosity of style and their lyric power. His travel diary, “Voyage,” was also well received. The descriptions of the isolated landscape and of the harsh lifestyle of the family blend effectively with the tale of corruption.

**The Lenihan Stories** The Lenihan stories are built around the lives of the Lenihans, an Irish immigrant family living in Auckland. Its rigorous, spare prose style, and the motif of the gate the children swing on, reflecting the futility of all action, are typical of the stories of this period and are critically admired. These Lenihan stories have been compared favorably with Mansfield’s Karori works on the Burnell family, which were written under similar circumstances. The Lenihan stories were mostly published in Duggan’s first book, *Immanuel’s Land* (1956), and have remained among the most popular of his works.

### Responses to Literature

1. Investigate New Zealand—its history, geography, culture, and people. Write a paper that explains how the setting of New Zealand contributes to Duggan’s

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who also wrote on family themes in a spare, or minimalist, prose style:

*The House on Mango Street* (1984), a novel by Sandra Cisneros. In this tightly styled work, the main character, Esperanza, tells her story of growing up a Chicana girl in Chicago.

"Soldier's Home" (1925), by Ernest Hemingway. This concise short story is about Harold Krebs, a soldier returning from war.

*Tumble Home* (1998), a prose collection by Amy Hempel. In this collection are a novella and several short stories, all centered on characters making their way home.

*Where I'm Calling From* (1988), by Raymond Carver. This collection of contemporary short stories set in the Pacific Northwest involve the simple but miserable lives of common and working-class Americans.

themes, perhaps choosing a specific story to illustrate your argument.

2. Visit the New Zealand Book Council Web site (cited below), search for Jack Ross, and read one of his poems (such as "Cover"). In a group, identify the images that make Ross's poem one about the "new" North Shore of New Zealand. Then, identify the "old" New Zealand in an early Duggan story. What does your comparison say about changes to the country's culture, technology, politics, or physical geography?
3. Duggan's earliest story, "Six Place Names and a Girl," proved a breakthrough with its minimalist tendencies. Research "minimalism" online with a partner. Make a list of characteristics of the genre and find examples of minimalist writing/writers. As you read a Duggan story, discuss how this technique affects the reader.

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## Alexandre Dumas

BORN: 1802, Villers-Cotterêts, France

DIED: 1870, Puys, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, short stories, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

*Henry III and His Court* (1829)

*The Three Musketeers* (1844)

*Twenty Years After* (1845)

*The Count of Monte Cristo* (1846)

*The Man in the Iron Mask* (1847)

### Overview

Enormously popular and prolific, Alexandre Dumas wrote two of the most widely read novels in literary history, *The Three Musketeers* (1844) and *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1845). He also helped to inaugurate and popularize Romantic drama on the French stage with his



Alexandre Dumas Dumas, Alexandre, photograph.

two plays *Henry III and his Court* (1829) and *Antony* (1831).

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Impoverished Youth** Alexandre Dumas is generally called Dumas *père* to distinguish him from his illustrious son Alexandre (known as Dumas *fils*), who was also a dramatist and novelist. He was born on July 24, 1802. His father, Thomas-Alexandre Dumas Davy de la Pailleterie—born in Haiti to a minor French nobleman and a black slavewoman—had risen to the rank of general in the French revolutionary army. Dumas's parents met when Thomas-Alexandre was stationed at her family's inn in August of 1789. The couple was married in Villers-Cotterêts on November 28, 1792, and subsequently had three children, of whom Alexandre was the third, born a few months prior to his father's involuntary retirement from active duty.

Unsuccessful in his attempts to collect back pay, General Dumas and his family lived in poor circumstances. The general's health, which had declined during his detention in Italy, continued to fail, and he died in 1806. In *Mémoires*, published more than forty years later, Dumas would recall his deep affection and admiration for his father, whose image remained vivid in his mind.

An indifferent student, Dumas learned Latin, penmanship (at which he excelled), and reading. Dumas would later come to realize how poorly educated he was and would work to fill in the gaps in his studies. He would also transform his boyhood experience as a student in Villers-Cotterêts into the stuff of fiction, using it as the basis for his description of the main character's education in the novel *Six Years Later; or, The Taking of the Bastille* (1851).

**Political Skeptic and Avid Hunter** In November of 1814 Dumas's mother, whose repeated and increasingly desperate requests for payment of her husband's military pension had fallen on deaf ears, was granted instead a license to open a tobacconist's shop. It seems reasonable to assume that the ingratitude and indifference with which his father's (and later also his own) services were rewarded by the government colored Dumas's views of most political regimes. What is certain is that the rich and powerful characters who people Dumas's novels and plays only belatedly and begrudgingly reward those who have served them, if at all.

In August of 1816, Dumas began working as an errand boy. Hired to run legal documents out to area farmers unable to come to town to sign them, Dumas often took time out to go hunting rather than attend promptly to his duties. His lifelong passion for hunting and his intimate knowledge of the forest would later provide the raw materials for masterful descriptions of animals, woods, and sporting scenes. Likewise, the game that the adolescent Dumas used to supplement the family's income and diet would become the object of many of the recipes in the posthumously published *Dumas on Food* (1873).

**A Love of Theater** The year 1819 was marked by several significant events. On June 27, Dumas met Adolphe Ribbing de Leuven, a young Swedish nobleman. Destined to become a lifelong friend and occasional literary collaborator, Leuven stimulated Dumas's love of the theater. Through Leuven, Dumas would meet others who helped shape his career. In September, Dumas began a relationship with the first of his many mistresses. In October, Dumas attended a performance of Jean-François Ducis's 1769 adaptation of *Hamlet* in Soissons and was so overwhelmed by the experience that he purchased a copy of the text and learned the lead role by heart. When Leuven returned from a five-month stay in Paris in March of 1820, he and Dumas collaborated on two vaudeville comedies and a drama. No trace remains of any of these early pieces, which the authors tried, unsuccessfully, to have produced in Paris.

The family's financial circumstances were such that Dumas could not long remain without work. Thus, during the last days of March in 1823, the young man once again left for Paris, where he contacted some of his father's former comrades-in-arms in the hope that they would help him to find a job. It was only thanks to

General Maximilien Foy's last-minute discovery of Dumas's fine penmanship that the youth obtained a position on Louis-Philippe, Duc d'Orléans's secretarial staff.

In March of 1825 Dumas, Leuven, and James Rousseau wrote a one-act vaudeville, which was performed on September 22, 1825, and was published the same year. Dumas was reprimanded for neglecting his office duties, but he paid no attention to this advice, and in February of 1826 he, Leuven, and the printer L. P. Sétier founded and managed a poetry review named the *Psyché*, which appeared from March 1826 until January 1830. Dumas published many of his own poems in this review, the first of several newspaper ventures he would undertake during his lifetime.

**Theatrical Triumph** In the meantime, in the space of two months, Dumas had written a five-act historical drama in prose, *Henry III and His Court*. Rehearsals for the play began immediately. Because Dumas neglected his work to attend rehearsals, he was forced to choose between his job and his play. He chose the latter. The piece opened on February 10, 1829, with the duc d'Orléans and his dinner guests in attendance. The play was a triumph; it was published two weeks later.

This play includes many elements Dumas would use again in other dramas and novels: a compelling if broadly sketched picture of a society in the midst of a political conflict; real people and places used as a backdrop for an invented tale of passion and ambition; masterful dialogues coupled with powerfully dramatic conclusions; unhappy lovers, at least one of whom dies a spectacular death; a practitioner of some (pseudo-) scientific profession; characters who jump out of windows or use secret passages; women who are portrayed either as angels or devils, and men whose friendships are at least as powerful as love, if not more so.

Though suddenly a successful playwright, Dumas nonetheless resumed working for the Duc d'Orléans, and on June 20, 1829, he was assigned a position as assistant librarian at the Palais-Royal. In July, Dumas participated in the Revolution of 1830. He describes this tumultuous period in his *Mémoires*, highlighting in particular his seizure of an arsenal in Soisson. Life in times of revolution, much like the ones he lived through, also became an important part of his later fiction, such as *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

The Revolution of 1830 temporarily diverted Dumas from his writing. His liberal activities were viewed unfavorably by the new king, and Dumas traveled for a time outside France. A series of amusing travel books resulted from this period of exile.

**His Collaborative Fiction** When Dumas returned to Paris, a new series of historical plays flowed from his pen. He also began writing fiction at this time, first composing short stories and then novels. Almost all of the books composed during the next fifteen years first appeared in serial form. Dumas certainly profited from

this arrangement but so too did the newspaper owners, who saw their readership increase whenever they printed a Dumas text. While Dumas and his collaborators continued throughout this time to write what might be called "stand alone" novels, they also developed several series of novels that are now among Dumas's best-known works. In collaboration with Auguste Maquet he wrote the trilogy *The Three Musketeers* (1844), *Twenty Years After* (1845), and *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne* (1850). *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1846) was also a product of this period. Dumas and his associates almost always adapted their novels for the theater, where they were also very well received.

Dumas had many collaborators—Auguste Maquet, Paul Lacroix, Paul Bocage, and P. A. Fiorentino, to name only a few—but it was undoubtedly with Maquet that he produced his best novels. He had assistants who supplied him with the outlines of romances whose original form he had already drawn up; then he would write the work himself.

Not surprisingly, Dumas's success during this period caused resentment among some of his contemporaries. In late February of 1845 Eugène de Mirecourt published a pamphlet entitled *The Novel Factory: Alexandre Dumas & Company*. Notorious for its virulent, racist attack on Dumas, Mirecourt's brochure also denounced Dumas for using collaborators and for unfairly monopolizing publishing opportunities in the newspapers. Dumas sued Mirecourt for slander and won his case on March 15, 1845. On March 26 he signed five-year exclusive contracts with the *Presse* and the *Constitutionnel* to furnish multivolume works for serial publication.

## Later Life

Dumas, who had never changed his republican opinions, greeted the Revolution of 1848 with enthusiasm and even ran as a candidate for the Assembly. In 1850 the Théâtre-Historique, which he had founded to present his plays, failed. After the coup d'état in 1851 and the seizure of power by Napoleon III, Dumas went to Brussels, where his secretary managed to restore some semblance of order to his affairs. There he continued to write prodigiously. After spending several years in Russia, Sicily, and Naples, he returned to Paris, where he found himself deep in debt and at the mercy of a host of creditors. His affairs were not helped by a succession of mistresses who expected—and received—lavish gifts from Dumas.

Working compulsively to pay his debts, Dumas produced a number of rather contrived works, among them *Madame de Chamblay* (1863) and *Les Mohicans de Paris* (1864), that were not received with great enthusiasm. His last years were softened by the presence of his son, Alexandre, and his devoted daughter, Madame Petel. He died in comparative poverty and obscurity on December 5, 1870.



## Works in Literary Context

Dumas does not penetrate deeply into the psychology of his characters; he is content to identify them by characteristic tags (the lean bitterness of Athos, the spunk of D'Artagnan) and hurl them into a thicket of wild and improbable adventures where, after heroic efforts, they will at last succumb to noble and romantic deaths. His heroes and heroines, strong-willed and courageous beings with sonorous names, are carried along in the rapid movement of the dramas, in the flow of adventure and suspenseful plots. Dumas adhered to no literary theory, except to write as the spirit moved him, which it often did.

***Alienation and Infidelity*** The experiences of Dumas's life formed recurring themes in his work. In his early play *Antony* (1831), for example, he highlighted the conflicts between the individual and society in contemporary Paris. The central figures in the play are a wife and mother who, when forced to choose between her lover and her reputation, bows to social pressures; and Antony, a man of exceptional merit whose illegitimate birth and unjust ostracism have brought him to despair and then to revolt. Dumas would use illegitimacy again in many of his works: *Captain Paul* (1838), *The Vicomte de Bragelonne; or, Ten Years Later* (1848–1850), *The Two Dianas* (1846–1847), and *The Regent's Daughter* (1844). The alienated hero whose superior intelligence, pride, and frustrated passion render him an outsider would also reappear in such works as *George* (1843) and *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844–1845), while the theme of adultery would figure prominently in *Diana of Meridor* (1846) as well as *The Three Musketeers* (1844) and *The Queen's Necklace* (1849–1850), among others.

***The Merit of Popular Literature*** “Popularizer” though he may have been, Dumas was not and should not be regarded as merely the author of entertaining adventure novels for adolescents. He considered himself a historian, and he believed that his works, with their reappearing characters and their broad chronological scope, might accurately be compared to those of Honoré de Balzac. Thus, he wrote that “Balzac wrote a vast and beautiful work with a hundred sides to it entitled *The Human Comedy*. Begun at the same time as his, our work . . . might be called *The Drama of France*.” In the end, though, no collective title ever became attached to Dumas's works, perhaps because his writings could not be categorized under any single heading, however broadly defined. The author of novels and plays, short stories and fantastic tales, travel writings and memoirs, newspaper articles and recipes, Dumas chronicled the political experiences and personal adventures of innumerable real and imagined characters across the ages.

***Historical Drama and Beyond*** The view of Dumas as the “French Walter Scott,” based as it is on a series of novels written from the mid-1840s to the

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Dumas's famous contemporaries include:

**Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky** (1840–1893): Russian composer perhaps best known today for his *1812 Overture* and his ballet *The Nutcracker*, which was based on Dumas's adaptation of a story originally written by E. T. A. Hoffman.

**Louis-Phillipe I** (1773–1850): The “Citizen-King” of France from 1830 to 1848, and also the last king of France, placed on the throne during the July Revolution of 1830 that deposed Charles X. His reign was marked by initial support from working-class citizens that gradually turned to resentment, then open rebellion in 1848, when he abdicated the throne and fled to England.

**Honoré Daumier** (1808–1879): Painter, sculptor, draftsman, and caricaturist whose biting satirical political cartoons had the capacity to seriously sway public opinion. Just as famous for his lithographs and paintings, Daumier was one of France's most respected nineteenth-century artists.

**Auguste Maquet** (1813–1888): French author and playwright best known for his frequent collaborations with Dumas. Unlike Dumas, he used his book earnings wisely and lived in comfort until his death.

mid-1850s, is an oversimplification. Although Dumas may be particularly remembered as the author of historical romances, when those works began appearing he was already famous for a run of successful plays. It is important to remember, too, that Dumas never abandoned his career as a playwright, although once his success as a novelist was confirmed, he came increasingly to adapt his novels for the stage rather than to write original pieces for the theater.

## Works in Critical Context

Despite their unflagging worldwide popularity, their near-universal availability, and their innumerable movie adaptations, the works of Alexandre Dumas have been largely unappreciated by critics. There has been, for some time now, a specialized journal devoted to Dumas studies, and articles on Dumas have regularly appeared in other scholarly publications. Still, Dumas's novels and plays receive little attention in the standard histories of nineteenth-century French literature and are rarely found on lists of required reading at French or American universities.

***Too Many Books*** Throughout his long career, Dumas wrote works in virtually every literary genre, sometimes publishing two or more novels simultaneously in serial

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Dumas used his plays and fiction to explore the changing face of France both in his own times and in the past. Other works that cover similar ground include:

*The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831), a novel by Victor Hugo. Set in fifteenth-century Paris, this novel makes a powerful statement about social justice, as well as being an impassioned plea against “modernizing” the great cathedral.

*The Phantom of the Opera* (1911), a novel by Gaston Leroux. Based partly on Leroux’s research into various legends surrounding the Paris opera house, this Gothic thriller tells the story of a deformed man’s doomed love for a beautiful opera singer.

*A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), a novel by Charles Dickens. The second historical novel Dickens wrote, this chronicles the turbulent days of the French Revolution during the last decades of the eighteenth century, climaxing with the bloody Reign of Terror.

*La Comédie humaine*, a collection of fiction by Honoré de Balzac. This sequence of ninety-five finished and forty-eight unfinished works depicts French society in the time between the Restoration of the French Monarchy after Napoleon (1815) and the July Monarchy of Louis-Philippe that ended in the Revolution of 1848.

form. From the nineteenth century to the present, critics have tended to be suspicious of this level of output, and they will often dismiss as unworthy of respect any author who writes a great deal. This attitude is apparent in the imaginary conversation Delphine de Girardin included in one of her *Parisian Letters* (1845) to explain why Dumas, like Balzac, failed to get elected to the French Academy:

Messrs. Balzac and Alexandre Dumas write fifteen to eighteen volumes a year, one can’t forgive them for that.—But they are excellent novels.—That’s no excuse, there are too many of them.—But they are wildly successful.—That’s one more thing to hold against them: let them write a single, slim, mediocre volume, let no one read it, and then we’ll see. Too much baggage is an impediment to admission to the Academy, where the orders are the same as at the Tuileries Garden; those who carry oversize packages are not allowed inside.”

**Too Much Assistance** Another factor also appears to have detracted from Dumas’s critical stature: his use of collaborators. “Dumas does not have the kind of imagination that invents things, but one that puts things together,” writes one of his more recent biographers, Claude Schopp. Schopp goes on to suggest that, with

the possible exception of Auguste Maquet, most of the author’s collaborators contributed little more than the initial idea for a work, which Dumas then developed and wrote by himself. Still, at least since the time when the Romantics redefined literary genius in terms of originality and individuality, literary critics have been reluctant to praise authors who, like Dumas, relied on collaborators to help them research and develop their texts.

**Too Easy to Read** There are also those who, like Michel Picard, would argue that while Dumas’s writings are engaging and even seductive, they do not display the characteristics of serious literature. A Dumas text reads so easily, contends Picard, that one is not even conscious of reading it; it operates “in such a way as to deprive the reader of the capacity to think.” Behind this lies the belief that “real” literature is defined by its complexities.

## Contemporary Opinions

Critical appreciation of Dumas’s achievements has increased over time. During his lifetime, he was beset by accusations of plagiarism and outright fraud. He defended his practices, minimizing the contribution of his collaborators and arguing that he had reworked rather than copied the writings of others, but his reputation was severely damaged nonetheless. His tendency late in his career to pad his works for the sake of profit further jeopardized his fame. However, Dumas’s literary stature rebounded shortly after his death, as critics showed a greater tolerance towards his authorial practices. Many of these commentators emphasized that Dumas was indeed responsible for the original quality of his works regardless of his borrowings and collaborations. Still, most critics grant that Dumas neither aspired to nor achieved profundity. Instead, he is usually discussed in terms of his unmatched storytelling ability and depicted as an entertainer par excellence.

## Responses to Literature

1. Read about Cardinal Richelieu’s real life and compare it to his life as portrayed by Dumas in *The Three Musketeers*. How accurately did Dumas portray the Cardinal?
2. Dumas presents the siege of La Rochelle as an amusing picnic for the Musketeers. Research conflicts like the Thirty Years War and English civil war. What was war really like in the seventeenth century for the average foot soldier? Were there many opportunities for glory? Why did soldiers fight, if not for glory?
3. Dumas enthusiastically supported the revolutions of 1830 and 1848. What was the cause behind these revolutions? Did they achieve any lasting effects on European politics and society?
4. Critical opinion of Dumas’s work has suffered in comparison to his contemporaries in large part



because of the perception that Dumas only wrote “popular” fiction and did not aspire to create literature. Do you think this is a valid opinion? Is it possible for mass-market fiction to achieve greatness? Can you think of any modern examples of popular fiction that you would classify as great works of literature?

5. Many of Dumas’s best-known works are set in the past. Can you think of other examples of stories set in specific historical time periods that you have read? Do you think these types of books are valuable instruments for learning about the past? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of learning about history through historical fiction?

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## Daphne du Maurier

BORN: 1907, London, England

DIED: 1989, Par, Cornwall, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Jamaica Inn* (1936)

*Rebecca* (1938)

*Frenchman’s Creek* (1941)

*My Cousin Rachel* (1951)

### Overview

Daphne du Maurier was a British author of popular fiction who had the rare quality of being nearly as highly regarded by many critics as she was by her readers. As Margaret Forster wrote for London’s *Sunday Times*, “If all our popular bestsellers were of her excellence then there would be no need to deplore their existence, and the silly snobbery existing between ‘pulp’ fiction and literary fiction would vanish.” Though she wrote dozens of novels, short stories, plays, and nonfiction works, she is perhaps best remembered for the film adaptations of her work, including two films by Alfred Hitchcock: *Rebecca* and *The Birds*.



Daphne du Maurier Hans Wild / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Her Own Way** Daughter of renowned actor Gerald du Maurier and granddaughter of artist and author George du Maurier (*Trilby*), young Daphne first turned to writing as a means of escape. Despite a happy and financially secure childhood, she often felt “inadequate” and desperately in need of solitude. She delighted in the imaginary world of books and play-acting and stubbornly resisted “growing up” until her late teens. After shunning the debutante scene and a chance at an acting career, du Maurier was determined to succeed on her own terms—as a writer. During one ten-week stay at her parents’ country home on the Cornish coast, the twenty-four-year-old Englishwoman wrote her first novel, *The Loving Spirit*, a romantic family chronicle. A best seller that achieved a fair share of critical acclaim, *The Loving Spirit* so impressed a thirty-five-year-old major in the Grenadier Guards that he piloted his motor launch past the du Maurier home in the hope of meeting the author. Major Frederick “Boy” Browning and du Maurier married a few months later, setting off by boat on a honeymoon “just like the couple in *The Loving Spirit*,” according to Nicholas Wade in the *Times Literary Supplement*.

**Rebecca** Daphne du Maurier lived in Cornwall for forty years, twenty-five of them in Menabilly, a seventeenth-century house that she described as the most beautiful she

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Du Maurier's famous contemporaries include:

**Woody Guthrie** (1912–1969): American folk singer who wrote "This Land Is Your Land."

**Thomas Keneally** (1935–): Australian novelist best known for his novel *Schindler's Ark* (1982), which was later adapted into the film *Schindler's List*.

**Gabriel García Márquez** (1928–): Colombian novelist and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature.

**John Fitzgerald Kennedy** (1917–1963): The thirty-fifth president of the United States of America, John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963. His term in office began in 1961.

**Lawrence Durrell** (1912–1990): British novelist who was famous for his tetralogy *The Alexandria Quartet*.

had ever seen. Cornwall, a region of mystery and superstition and the home of legendary figures such as King Arthur and Tristan and Isolde, is a landscape easily made gothic; it is the home, as well, of pirates both fictional and historical, with a coastline that has been responsible for innumerable shipwrecks. While never a fully assimilated Cornishwoman, du Maurier was certainly inspired by her adopted home, the setting of some of her best and best-known novels: *Jamaica Inn* (1936), *Frenchman's Creek* (1941), and *The House on the Strand* (1969). It is, therefore, not surprising that du Maurier took time out from her many successful novels to write a history of Cornwall (1967).

It was in Alexandria, Egypt, where her husband was posted in 1936, that du Maurier began her fifth novel, *Rebecca*, published in 1938. Far from home, unhappy in the company of both the British military and the Egyptians, du Maurier often thought about Cornwall—fantasizing about, as much as recalling, its lush forests and pounding seas that stood in stark contrast to the stifling and arid desert. These fantasies and a sense of profound melancholy inform the mood of *Rebecca*, the story of a naive working-class woman whom the recently widowed Maxim de Winter marries and takes back to his palatial family mansion, Manderley, in the south of England. There the second Mrs. de Winter—her first name is never given—discovers that she must compete with the memory of the former mistress of the house, Rebecca, whose qualities, as the creepy housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers, constantly points out, were in dramatic contrast to those of the unsophisticated newcomer. But the bride comes to learn that she need not be jealous of her predecessor, for Max hated his first wife. Late in the novel, he is charged with her murder, but during the trial evidence is intro-

duced at the last moment that exonerates him. Returning home, the de Winters discover that the distraught Mrs. Danvers has burned Manderley down; Max and his bride are free to start their lives over again.

The response to *Rebecca* was overwhelmingly positive; critics pointed out that du Maurier could no longer be compared to the Brontës or to any other novelist, but had found her own voice.

Du Maurier basked in the delight of her sudden fame for a time, and then went back to what she knew best—writing. *Frenchman's Creek* was published in 1941, *My Cousin Rachel* in 1951, *The Scapegoat* in 1957, and *Flight of the Falcon* in 1965. According to Jane S. Bakerman, writing in *And Then There Were Nine . . . More Women of Mystery*, these books are, in addition to *Jamaica Inn* and *Rebecca*, the six novels on which du Maurier's "auctorial reputation rests most firmly." There were certainly a bevy of others, including *The King's General*, *Hungry Hill*, and *The House on the Strand*, but the core of her work can be seen in these six.

### Works in Literary Context

An avid reader from early childhood, du Maurier was especially fond of the works of Walter Scott, W. M. Thackeray, the Brontë sisters, and Oscar Wilde. Other authors who strongly influenced her include R. L. Stevenson, Katherine Mansfield, Guy de Maupassant, and W. Somerset Maugham. From these writers, du Maurier grew to understand how to write a gothic masterpiece.

**The Gothic Thread** Gothic literature is marked by the fear of the supernatural's intrusion into one's life. Often, the setting for gothic literature is a large, dark, and foreboding castle or a weatherworn house on a wind-beaten plain, where characters find themselves isolated from the rest of society. The past—often represented by a ghost or the fear of a ghost—presents frightening challenges for the current inhabitants of these scary places. A further complication of traditional gothic literature is the inclusion of a love affair or marriage that is somehow challenged by the specter of the ghosts, both real and psychological, that haunt the settings. The Brontë sisters effectively utilized this formula in novels like *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, and it is in this tradition that one can best place du Maurier's fiction.

**Legacy** Du Maurier was most proficient in creating psychological or gothic thrillers—usually with some connection to the past—that focus on the struggle of an individual against an oppressive environment. Her best novels—*Rebecca*, *The Scapegoat*, *My Cousin Rachel*, *The House on the Strand*, and *The Flight of the Falcon*—are strong in characterization, setting, and plot. Although she was able to live comfortably as a result of the commercial success of her works and was made a dame of the British Empire in 1969 for her literary contributions to the United Kingdom, du Maurier did not occupy a place in the literary canon during her lifetime—much to her

disappointment. A reassessment of the canon has led in recent years to the “discovery” of several previously neglected figures in British literature, most of them women. This list includes Daphne du Maurier.

### Works in Critical Context

While critics have praised a few of du Maurier’s novels—*Rebecca* and *My Cousin Rachel*—with unabashed joy, the novelist has not fared so well with her other work. Indeed, some critics find the plots of her other novels unlikely and the writing sloppy and unbelievable. Despite these problems, however, the overall assessment of du Maurier’s body of work has been largely positive—scholars finding the pleasure of du Maurier’s unlikely stories to outweigh the problems they find in the texts.

***Rebecca*** “Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again.” With these words, among the most recognizable in twentieth-century gothic fiction, Daphne du Maurier began her classic novel *Rebecca*. Described by the *Spectator*’s Kate O’Brien as “a Charlotte Brontë story minus Charlotte Brontë,” *Rebecca* takes a familiar situation (the arrival of a second wife in her new husband’s home) and turns it into an occasion for mystery, suspense, and violence. Its primary features—an enigmatic heroine in a cold and hostile environment, a brooding hero tormented by a guilty secret, and a rugged seacoast setting—are now virtual staples of modern romantic novels. Though reviewers have long pointed out (and du Maurier agreed) that she could not take credit for inventing this formula, many critics believe that du Maurier’s personal gift for storytelling places her novels a cut above other gothic fiction.

As V. S. Pritchett remarked in a review of *Rebecca*: “Many a better novelist would give his eyes to be able to tell a story as Miss Du Maurier does, to make it move at such a pace and to go with such mastery from surprise to surprise. . . . From the first sinister rumors to the final conflagration the melodrama is excellent.” M. F. Brown also commented in the *New York Times* on du Maurier’s “ability to tell a good story and people it with twinkling reality,” while John Patton of *Books* wrote: “[*Rebecca*] is first and last and always a thrilling story. . . . Du Maurier’s style in telling her story is exactly suited to her plot and her background, and creates the exact spirit and atmosphere of the novel. The rhythm quickens with the story, is always in measure with the story’s beat. And the writing has an intensity, a heady beauty, which is itself the utterance of the story’s mood.”

**“Sloppy and Chaotic” Prose** Despite the almost overwhelming critical praise for *Rebecca*, some critics believed du Maurier’s other work exhibits too much melodrama, too many plot similarities, and too little character development and analysis. With the exception of *My Cousin Rachel*, a book several critics have hailed as another *Rebecca*, many of du Maurier’s later novels suffer in comparison. The *Spectator*’s Paul Ableman, for instance,

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of the staples of gothic literature is the importance of the home in which the action of the novel usually occurs. Often set in old castles and homes with rich and long histories, the gothic novel focuses on the life of the domicile itself. Here are a few more works that analyze the life force of a home:

*Northanger Abbey* (1817), a novel by Jane Austen. Written early in her career but published after her death, this novel is a witty response to the popular gothic fiction of Austen’s day.

“The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. In this masterwork, the “House of Usher” reflects the decline of the family that inhabits it. As the last in the line of Usher becomes frail and his health fails, so, too, does the house of Usher crumble.

*House of Leaves* (2000), a novel by Mark Z. Danielewski. As the marriage between the protagonists in this novel is challenged, the house in which they live expands—new rooms appear out of nowhere—and the characters feel compelled to explore the dark depths of these strange caverns that seem to stretch out for miles.

declared that her “plots creak and depend on either outrageous coincidence or shamelessly contrived mood,” that her prose is “both sloppy and chaotic,” and that her dialogue consists of “rent-a-line, prefabricated units for the nobs or weird demotic for the yokels.” And L. A. G. Strong, another *Spectator* critic, pointed out the “facile, out-of-character lines that disfigure the often excellent dialogue,” as well as a certain “laziness over detail” and a “mixture of careful with perfunctory work.” In addition, insists Beatus T. Lucey of *Best Sellers*, “nowhere does the reader become engaged and involved in the action.”

**Overall Assessment** Despite the views of critics who complain about plot similarities and stereotyped characters, Jean Stubbs of *Books and Bookmen* remained convinced of the writer’s success. “Daphne Du Maurier has the deserved reputation of being an outstanding storyteller,” Stubbs wrote. “She has the gift of conveying mystery and holding suspense, above all of suggesting the grip of the unknown on ordinary lives. . . . She is passionately devoted to Cornwall, and insists on our participation. Her sense of theatre creates some characters a little larger than life, and her commonsense surrounds them with people we have met and known, so that the eccentric and dramatic is enhanced.”

Furthermore, as a critic for the *Times Literary Supplement* pointed out in a review of *Rebecca*, it may not be to anyone’s benefit to approach du Maurier’s work as one would approach great literature. “If one chooses to read

the book in a critical fashion—but only a tiresome reviewer is likely to do that—it becomes an obligation to take off one’s hat to Miss du Maurier for the skill and assurance with which she sustains a highly improbable fiction,” the critic stated. “Whatever else she may lack, it is not the story-teller’s flow of fancy. All things considered, [hers] is an ingenious, exciting and engagingly romantic tale.”

## Responses to Literature

1. Research the term *melodrama*. After having read *Jamaica Inn*, do you believe that du Maurier’s work can accurately be described as “melodramatic”? Why or why not? Can you think of a film or novel that you have read that seems to be more melodramatic? In a short essay, explore these questions.
2. Using the Internet and the library, research Menabilly, du Maurier’s home. Menabilly has been cited as the inspiration for the places described in *Frenchman’s Creek* and *Jamaica Inn*. In a short essay, discuss the ways in which du Maurier utilizes the real-life place Menabilly in her novels. (Consider the details du Maurier chooses to include and those she chooses to exclude.)
3. Du Maurier said that she was less interested in writing individual characters than she was in writing types of characters. What effect did this decision have on her novels? How does this focus affect your feelings about the characters that populate her novels? In order to answer these questions, consider the novels *Rebecca* and *My Cousin Rachel*.
4. People often say, “The book was better than the movie.” Considering how well du Maurier describes her settings, and considering how remarkably films can present these settings, which medium do you feel is more effective in capturing the essence of *Rebecca*? Why do you feel as you do? How important is the visual component in the appreciation of the novel?

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## Lord Dunsany

BORN: 1878, London, England

DIED: 1957, Dublin, Ireland

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Glittering Gate* (1909)

*The Chronicles of Rodriguez* (1922)

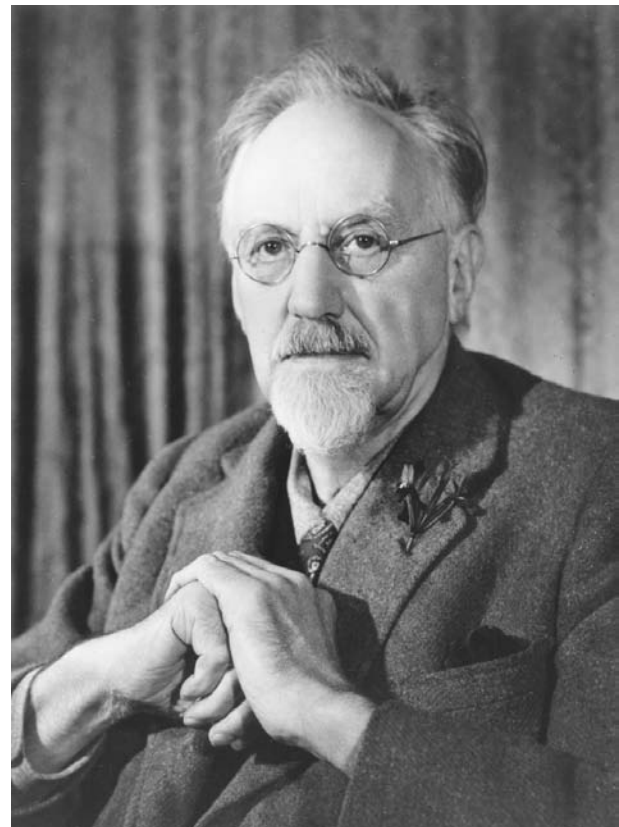
*The King of Elfland’s Daughter* (1924)

*The Charwoman’s Shadow* (1926)

“Two Bottles of Relish” (1932)

## Overview

Lord Dunsany was the name under which Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett (Baron Dunsany) wrote during an authorial career that spanned nearly five decades. An Irish aristocrat whose peerage stretched back to medieval times, Lord Dunsany is considered one of the earliest and most significant authors of modern fantasy literature. An



Lord Edward Dunsany Alexander Bassano / Hulton Archive / Getty Images

immensely prolific writer, Dunsany's sixty-plus volumes of drama, verse, and short stories were almost always written in longhand with an old-fashioned quill pen. He has been described as a "fantasist's fantasist"—although his work was popular during his lifetime, its continuing reputation has rested largely on the praise of other fantasy writers.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***Irish Heritage, Military Service, and Writing as a Sideline*** Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, Lord Dunsany, was born in London in July 1878. He was of an ancient Irish family and succeeded to the family title as the eighteenth Baron Dunsany in 1899. He was given a top-flight English education at Eton and the military academy at Sandhurst, and he went into a fashionable and famous regiment, the Coldstream Guards, which had been his grandfather's regiment. He served as a junior officer in Gibraltar and then in the Boer War from 1899 to 1902. Dunsany was married in 1904 to Lady Beatrice Child-Villiers, daughter of the seventh Earl of Jersey. They had one son, Randal Arthur Henry, who was born in 1906. In time, Dunsany gave the famous family castle in County Meath to his son, and Dunsany and his wife lived in England.

Although Dunsany always thought of himself first and foremost as a poet, it was not through his verse that he gained fame. Dunsany published several collections of short stories, but he first became well known through his association with Dublin's Abbey Theatre, beginning with the production of his *The Glittering Gate* in 1909.

In World War I, he was a captain in the Fifth Inniskilling Fusiliers, serving with distinction in France, and he received some minor wounds while battling Irish insurrectionists in 1916. After World War I, Dunsany took up literature as a sideline and was a prolific writer of drama (with encouragement from William Butler Yeats and others), short stories, poetry, and novels. Dunsany's personal opinions, prejudices, and passions—including his love of sports—often crop up in his work. He is chiefly remembered for several of his stories, including "Two Bottles of Relish," (1932) and for several plays that became part of his collected works.

Dunsany claimed that the fantastic novels and short stories he wrote simply came to him without much effort (and, he cautioned, ought not to have too much read into them). Although he had a quick intelligence, a sharp wit, and a sometimes dark humor, his theory was that the artist goes beyond that which his "intellect can discover." At his best Dunsany let himself be led by his lively imagination, and the dreamlike quality of his best work made him famous.

During World War II, Dunsany returned to Dunstall Priory in England as part of the Home Guard, hoping to assist if needed in capturing fallen German pilots or

defending England against a possible invasion—neither of which happened, somewhat to Dunsany's disappointment at his inability to contribute something to the war effort. However, a threatened German invasion in 1941 forced Dunsany to flee Greece, where he and his wife had gone upon his appointment as Byron Chair of English Literature at the national university in Athens.

***Modernization of Irish Folklore*** Dunsany's precise religious beliefs are a matter of some debate, but he most certainly was not a conventional Christian. In novels such as *The Gods of Pegana* he seems to be proposing that the gods described in the stories actually exist, but in other works such as *Time and the Gods* they are more like allegories. The gods and goddesses of Dunsany's works are there merely to express ideas but also to create a convincing, interesting, and unearthly world. As an educated Irishman, Dunsany would have been familiar with the rich history of Irish folklore and mythology, in addition to his scholarly study of the classical mythology of Greece and Rome. Unlike many other Irish writers, however, Dunsany is more famous for his originality than for his reproduction of traditional creation myths and legends. When he does so, as in *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, which borrows from the Irish myth of Oisín, he also mixes these elements with more modern ideas, such as evolution and physics.

Since Dunsany's colorful personality was just as much one of his great character creations as anyone who appears in his fiction, many consider it relevant to consider his several autobiographies as part of his literary achievement. He describes his life in *My Ireland* (1937), *Patches of Sunlight* (1938), *While the Sirens Slept* (1944), and *The Sirens Wake* (1945).

Apart from his more mainstream works, Dunsany is typically known as a fantasist, and his antimodern sentiments did not incline him much toward science fiction. One late novel, *The Last Revolution* (1951), however, stands on the border between fantasy and science fiction, even though its ideas continue to parallel the general nostalgia of his work. *The Last Revolution* follows a theme found in many other works of science fiction—namely, machines turning against those who created them.

Dunsany remained active until the end of his life, writing extensively and traveling often. He died at age seventy-nine of appendicitis on October 25, 1957, leaving behind a large body of uncollected work in addition to his dozens of published books.

## Works in Literary Context

***Tone and Language*** The tone of Dunsany's fantasies is distinctive. His works are recognized for their dreamlike atmosphere. The surreal effect of his scenes sometimes comes from the juxtaposition of stark, realistic images with the highly idealized landscapes of pastoral



## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Dunsany's famous contemporaries include:

**Winsor McCay** (1867–1934): American cartoonist whose best-known work is his comic strip “Little Nemo in Slumberland,” which ran from 1905–1914. The elaborately drawn strip created dreamlike fantasy figures that were an important influence on Walt Disney, Maurice Sendak, and many other cartoon artists.

**Lewis Carroll** (1832–1898): English author, mathematician, logician, Anglican clergyman, and photographer famous for writing the fantasy story *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and its sequel *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871).

**Kenneth Grahame** (1859–1932): British writer of short stories about children and their imaginative worlds who is chiefly remembered for his novel *The Wind in the Willows* (1908).

**Rudyard Kipling** (1865–1936): British author, poet, and friend of Lord Dunsany, famous for both children's and adult works, including *The Jungle Book* (1894) and “Gunga Din” (1892).

mythology. Dunsany has been estimated higher than many other creators of fantastic mythologies and fairy worlds because of his style. His cadences often resound in readers' memories, and his prose has been described as melodic, metaphoric, and poetic. Dunsany acknowledged the Bible's considerable influence on his work, citing it as containing the greatest English in the history of the language. *The Sword of Welleran and Other Stories* (1908) provides examples of this elevated prose style, influenced equally by older epics such as *Beowulf* in the language used by heroes to recount their exploits.

***Irony and Optimism*** The humor in Dunsany's work has been described as a sustained gentle irony. Reminiscent in some ways of Ernest Bramah or of Dunsany's own friend Rudyard Kipling, Dunsany related tales of the exotic but left it to readers to believe in them or not. He often lightly ridiculed his readers for their credulity, always including himself in the satire.

Dunsany was a longtime collaborator with the artist Sidney Herbert Sime. The art of both men was about imagining a golden world rather than the horrors that might lie beneath. Unlike much fantasy literature, Dunsany's was not gothic: readers are instead transported to ethereal realms with glittering golden pavements, worlds where even if a mysterious wager turns out to have immediately evil consequences, all will come right in the end. Yet, Dunsany's stories are not mere fairy tales—they remind readers of the common fallibility of human and

god, suggesting that the world is (or should be) governed by an always-present mercy and forgiveness.

***Fantastic Influence*** Dunsany is often cited as a strong influence on later writers of fantasy—a genre that stretches back to the medieval Romances populated by wizards and dragons and reaches forward to the edge of contemporary science fiction. Like J. R. R. Tolkien, the most famous, if not necessarily the first of the great fantasy writers, Dunsany was skilled at creating entire imaginative worlds complete with their own religions, traditions, and cultures. Unlike Tolkien or C. S. Lewis, however, Dunsany did not create one imaginative world and stay in it—he was endlessly inventive and started fresh with each novel or short story. Dunsany shares with Tolkien a nostalgia for a simpler and more idyllic time in the misty past of English and Irish history, but for Dunsany, these values are always threatened by the greed and lack of imagination shown by the encroaching modern world.

### Works in Critical Context

Dunsany's contemporaries praised the author primarily as a great dramatist. He first came to prominence through his association with the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, the home base of other well-known Irish writers, including William Butler Yeats, J. M. Synge, and Lady Gregory. But during his lifetime, Dunsany achieved his greatest renown in the United States, where he was known as “America's favorite peer.” He once had five plays running simultaneously in New York.

Although Dunsany's career spanned nearly five decades, his early works continue to dominate critical discussion of his writings. Modern readers tend to neglect both his dramatic works and his novels in favor of his short fiction. In 1969, critic George Brandon Saul observed that sometimes Dunsany's concern with the dreamworld led him into sentimentality and extreme vagueness of fancy, and his writing suggested more of a generalized talent than it did genius. Nevertheless, critics have generally recognized Dunsany's talent as having had a major influence on fantasy novels and the sometimes symbolic genre of science fiction.

S. T. Joshi has suggested that this view of his output is too narrow, however. “Let us marvel at [Dunsany's] seemingly effortless mastery of so many different forms (short story, novel, play, even essay and lecture), his unfailingly sound narrative sense, and the amazing consistency he maintained over a breathtakingly prolific output,” writes Joshi. Joshi continues: “Dunsany claimed aesthetic independence from his time and culture, [and] became a sharp and unrelenting critic of the industrialism and plebeianism that were shattering the beauty both of literature and of the world . . .”

***The King of Elfland's Daughter*** Few of Dunsany's works have received as much critical attention as *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, since its publication in

1924. Critic Roger C. Schlobin summarizes a widely held belief that Dunsany's "greatest stylistic triumph is the much-heralded *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, and in this novel all the qualities of his fantastic fictions are epitomized." Despite such praise, some critics have claimed that Dunsany's second effort as a novelist fails in fictional terms. The descriptive and imaginative gifts that many have praised in his short fiction, these critics argue, do not serve him well in a longer form, and the book suffers from wordiness and excessive detail.

## Responses to Literature

1. What is "dreamlike" about Dunsany's fiction? Even though Dunsany cautions his readers against reading "too much" into his work, does the fact that Dunsany drew upon his own dreams open up his work to psychological interpretations? How do you interpret a polished work of fiction differently than you would interpret a dream?
2. Many modern writers of fantasy still use the formal writing style employed by Dunsany in his most famous work, *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. Why do you think this style of writing has remained so closely associated with tales of fantasy? How would a fantasy tale written in a modern style—including slang—differ from Dunsany's tales in tone and mood? To test your speculation, copy a paragraph or two from the novel and rewrite it in modern language.
3. Although Dunsany is not very well known among modern readers, another fantasy writer who wrote at about the same time—J. R. R. Tolkien—remains the most popular fantasy author of all time. List some ways in which Tolkien's works differ from those of Dunsany. This can include writing style, subject matter, and themes, among other things. Do these differences help to explain why Tolkien remains so much more popular than Dunsany? Or do you think Dunsany has been unfairly ignored by modern readers?
4. Do some research on the "Celtic Revival" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Irish writers such as William Butler Yeats were encouraging other Irish writers of the time to emphasize Irish mythologies and folktales as an expression of Irish nationalism. Do you think it is fair to include Dunsany in this movement? Does his use of Irish mythology fit the model of what the Celtic Revivalists had in mind?

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## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of Dunsany's major themes is that the fantasy world is threatened with extinction by the modern forces of reason, science, or organized religion. Other writers who have also created fantastic worlds that are endangered by modern ways include:

*Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485), an anthology of legends by Sir Thomas Malory. One of the first books printed in Britain, Malory's collection about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table mark the transition from a pagan to a Christian worldview.

*Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* (1904), a play by J. M. Barrie. This work, which formed the basis of Barrie's later novelization and the many adaptations, asks the audience to actively express their belief in fairies in order to help save the life of a character.

*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1996), a nonfiction book by Thomas Kuhn. In this highly readable history of scientific thought, Kuhn argues that one major view of the universe (a "paradigm") is considered factually true until another one comes along to replace it.

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## ❏ Marguerite Duras

BORN: 1914, Saigon, French Indochina

DIED: 1996, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, drama

#### MAJOR WORKS:

*The Sea Wall* (1950)

*The Sailor from Gibraltar* (1952)

*The Ravishing of Lol Stein* (1964)

*The Lover* (1984)

*The North China Lover* (1991)

### Overview

One of the most important literary figures in France, Marguerite Duras won international acclaim after she was awarded the 1984 Prix Goncourt for her autobiographical novel *The Lover*. Although Duras had been writing fiction and directing films for over forty years,



Marguerite Duras Duras, Marguerite, 1955, photograph. Lipnitzki / Roger Viollet / Getty Images.

she was always considered a rather inaccessible author by the general public. The publication of *The Lover* sparked interest in all her work, which was quickly republished to meet the overwhelming demand. Featured in numerous interviews on television and in popular magazines in France, Duras became something of a national literary phenomenon.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***A Childhood in Indochina*** Duras was born Marguerite Donnadiou on April 4, 1914, near Saigon (present-day Ho Chi Minh City), Vietnam, then known as French Indochina, where her parents had moved to teach school. Following the death of her father when Duras was four years old, her mother spent the family's savings on a rice plantation, hoping the venture would prove viable enough to support her and her three young children. Unfortunately, the colonial officials who sold her the plantation were dishonest, the land was virtually worthless because of recurring flooding from the sea, and Duras's mother found herself broke and trying to raise her family far from home. The family's troubles in Indochina form the backdrop for many of Duras's novels. In particular, her most famous novel, *The Lover*, is based heavily on her own experiences as a young woman coming of age in French Indochina.

***A French Resistor*** Despite the family's poverty, Duras was able to study Vietnamese and French in the prestigious Lycée de Saigon. At the age of seventeen, Duras left for France and eventually earned a *licence* in law and political science at the University of Paris, Sorbonne. She worked as a secretary for the Ministry of Colonial Affairs until 1941, when World War II arrived at France's borders. At that time, France was invaded by German forces, resulting in the German occupation of much of France, with the rest of the country remaining "free" under a provisional government approved by the Germans and based in the city of Vichy. Duras became a member of the French Resistance who opposed the German occupation, working with François Mitterrand. She became a member of the French Communist Party, one of the main supporters of the French Resistance. In 1946 she divorced her first husband, Robert Antelme, whom she had married in 1939. She later married Dionys Mascolo, with whom she had a son, Jean. She published her first novel, *Les Impudents*, in 1943 and went on to publish more than seventy novels, plays, screenplays, and adaptations in her lifetime.

She was later dismissed from the French Communist Party in 1950 along with a number of other French intellectuals for ideological differences. Many who joined the party during World War II did so to show their opposition to Nazi Germany as well as their support of workers' rights. However, after World War II, communism became closely

associated with Joseph Stalin's dictatorial rule of the Soviet Union; Stalin's regime was notable less for the ruler's establishment of workers' rights than for his frequent use of imprisonment and murder against those who disagreed with his policies. This stigmatization of communism, especially in the United States, led to trouble between Duras and American officials over a travel visa in 1969. Duras, wishing to attend a New York Film Festival showing of her *Detruire, dit-elle*, had to prove to officials her adherence to anticommunist principles. Duras was also an apologist for the student uprisings in Paris in 1968 and a supporter of French president François Mitterrand during the 1980s.

In her later life, she lived with a young homosexual writer, Yann Andrea Steiner. In 1984, while recovering from alcoholism in a treatment center, Duras wrote *The Lover*, for which she won the Prix Goncourt in 1984. In poor health as a result of her lifelong alcoholism, she died on March 3, 1996, in Paris.

### Works in Literary Context

Duras's work has spanned many genres and styles, but the emotional intensity and themes of love, solitude, desire, and despair remain constant throughout. Commentators on Duras's work often divide her literary career into four periods. The novels from her first period have been described as her most realistic and conventional. Her most significant novel from this period, *The Sea Wall* (1950), is set in Indochina and reflects the author's interest in both East Asian culture and issues of social injustice and oppression. Like many of her acclaimed novels, the book is loosely based on an incident that occurred in Duras's childhood.

**Focus on the Individual** The works from Duras's second period are marked by a shift from linear plots and abrupt, obscure dialogue to a more personal and ironic idiom. The primary works from this period—*The Sailor from Gibraltar* (1952) and *The Little Horses of Tarquinia* (1953)—are considered more concentrated than Duras's previous novels because they focus on fewer characters, events, and relationships. *The Sailor from Gibraltar* concerns a woman who travels on her yacht throughout the Mediterranean in search of her former lover. Duras suggests that the protagonist's persistence gives meaning to her otherwise empty life. *The Little Horses of Tarquinia* similarly reflects Duras's increasing interest in individual characters and their varying moods and emotions.

**The Antinovel** Duras's third literary cycle includes works often described as antinovels, in which she employs minimalist techniques to accent particular experiences or emotions. *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* (1964), for instance, describes a woman's descent into madness after being rejected by her fiancé. Considered an antinovel because of its stark narrative, unreliable narrator, and fragmentary contrast and insights, *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* has also been described as an investigation into human conscious-

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Duras's famous contemporaries include:

**Samuel Beckett** (1906–1989): English dramatist and poet, Beckett's work straddles the line between modernist and postmodernist. His minimalist plays formed the keystone of what came to be called the "Theater of the Absurd."

**Robert Musil** (1880–1942): Austrian author of the same generation as Thomas Mann and Franz Kafka, Musil never received the same recognition as his peers despite being greatly admired by them. His unfinished masterpiece, *The Man Without Qualities*, would be recognized after his death as one of the most important modernist novels.

**Jawaharlal Nehru** (1889–1964): Major figure in the Indian independence movement, close associate of Mohandas Gandhi, Nehru was named the first prime minister of India after the country won its independence in 1947.

**Hélène Cixous** (1937–): French feminist writer, poet, critic, and philosopher, Cixous also wrote extensively on the relationship between sexuality and language, most famously in her 1975 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa."

**Charles de Gaulle** (1890–1970): French general, leader of the Free French during World War II, and founder of the French Fifth Republic in 1958, for which he served as its first president until 1969.

ness. *The Vice-Consul*, considered the last of Duras's antinovels, simultaneously focuses on a young Asian girl who is abandoned by her mother after becoming pregnant and a government official who becomes involved in the glamorous diplomatic life of Calcutta, India.

**Inability to Love** Duras's fourth and most eclectic literary period is evidenced in such novels as *The Malady of Death* (1982), *The Lover*, and *The North China Lover*. *The Malady of Death* is a minimalist account of an asexual man who pays a prostitute to live with him for a week and addresses his overwhelming sense of isolation and inability to love. *Emily L.* (1987), another novel from this period, also addresses how one's inability to love can lead to self-destruction.

**Autobiography** Often considered a revised version of *The Sea Wall*, *The Lover* explores more completely Duras's childhood experiences in French Indochina and her debilitating relationships with her overbearing mother and indolent brothers. While *The Lover* is recognizably autobiographical, Duras focuses on the recollection of events and their emotional significance rather than on the events themselves, thus creating a complex

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Duras's life as well as her fiction have been marked by the author's alcoholism. The following works also deal with alcoholism:

*John Barleycorn: Alcoholic Memoirs* (1913), a novel by Jack London. This novel is widely recognized as being the first intelligent literary treatise on alcohol in American literature.

*The Lost Weekend* (1944), a novel by Charles Jackson. In this novel, the author tackles the demons and obsessions that challenge the alcoholic.

*Days of Wine and Roses* (1962), a film by Blake Edwards. This story of an alcoholic man who draws his wife into his hard-drinking lifestyle received five Academy Award nominations.

structure that conveys the illusion of simplicity. In 1985, Duras published *The War: A Memoir* (1985), a collection of six narratives believed to have been written during World War II and forgotten for forty years. In the title story, Duras recounts her experiences with the French Liberation Movement during the war. She also describes the mental agony she endured while waiting for her husband, Robert Antelme, to return from a German concentration camp. *The North China Lover*, which began as a screenplay for Jean-Jacques Annaud's adaptation of her novel *The Lover*, tells the same story as the novel but in a very different style and tone. In addition, Duras provides cinematic directions—how a scene could be shot, what kind of actress should play a role—creating a work that is part novel, part screenplay. The publication of *The North China Lover* is in large part due to the disagreements between Duras and Annaud over the script for *The Lover*.

Regarding the relationship between her fiction and her life, Duras is quoted by writer Alan Riding as explaining: "Even when my books are completely invented, even when I think they have come from elsewhere, they are always personal." Speaking of how a writer should approach his work, Duras states: "You shouldn't have a subject. You have to go into the forest; you shouldn't be afraid, and it comes, all alone; stories of love, of foolishness, they come on their own, as if you were walking like a blind man before they arrived."

### Works in Critical Context

Critical commentary on Duras's work has focused on several major themes. These include the relationship between love and self-destruction, the metaphysics of boredom and inactivity, and the pain of solitude and despair. As Germaine Brée has observed: "The very title

of [*The Sea Wall*] suggests a dogged, unequal battle against a superhuman force. This was to remain one of Duras's basic themes: barrage against the immense solitude of human beings, barrage against the pain of all involvements, barrage against despair."

***The North China Lover*** Scholars have also noted Duras's movement away from the realism of her early novels to the minimalist techniques and focus on emotional experience of her later works. Considered one of her most abstract and impressionistic works, *The Vice-Consul*, notes Alfred Cismaru, contains "standard [anti-novel] devices: unfinished sentences, subconversations, hidden allusions . . . [and] mysterious and unexplained situations." At the time of its publication, many critics argued that *The Lover* was Duras's most effective synthesis of her themes and minimalist style. With the publication of *The North China Lover*, however, many critics argued that the latter was the better of the two closely related novels. In *The North China Lover*, Duras writes in the third person, a technique she uses to distance her characters from the reader, instead of switching between first and third person as she did in *The Lover*. While the second novel is more explicit and shocking, critics believe it is more humane, lyrical, and compelling.

### Responses to Literature

1. Duras was one of several French feminist playwrights active during the latter part of the twentieth century. Research another of these writers (Hélène Cixous, Monique Wittig, or Nathalie Sarraute) and analyze their style in comparison to Duras. What qualities make them feminist writers? How did their feminist views differ from each other?
2. In addition to her plays, Duras worked in cinema as both a screenwriter and director. Watch one of the films she worked on (*Hiroshima*, *Mon Amour* or *India Song*) and compare it to its literary source. How did Duras adapt the film? What changes did she make to the material? Do you feel the essential story remained the same?
3. What role does Duras's experience in the French colonies play in her writing? How does she represent colonial subjects in works such as *India Song* and *The Lover*?
4. One of Duras's recurring themes is the body. How does she portray the body in her writing? Is it a positive or negative object? What larger themes does the body represent?

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## ❑ Lawrence Durrell

BORN: 1912, Jullundur, India

DIED: 1990, Sommieres, France

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Black Book* (1938)

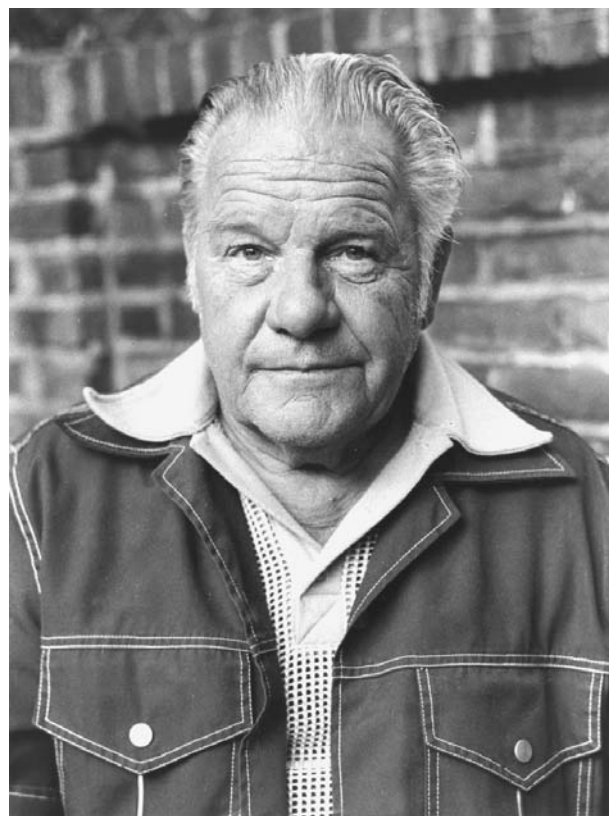
*A Key to Modern British Poetry* (1952)

*Bitter Lemons* (1957)

*The Alexandria Quartet* (1962)

### Overview

Lawrence Durrell is known primarily as the author of *The Alexandria Quartet* (1962), a set of four novels widely considered to be among the finest achievements in twentieth-century fiction. Continuing in the tradition of James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence, Durrell experiments with the structure of the novel while also probing the human psyche. His work is infused with observations on the nature



Lawrence Durrell Durrell, Lawrence George, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

of reality and sexuality, based in part on the theories of Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Early Life, Early Success** Lawrence Durrell was born in India in 1912 to Anglo-Irish parents who had never seen England because his family had lived in India for three generations. England had officially made India a part of the British Empire in 1858, after many Indians had attempted to drive out the British East India Company, which had effectively ruled much of India for a century. Among the many industries that flourished in India—primarily for trade and shipment back to England—were cotton and silk production.

Despite his family history, Durrell considered himself an Irishman. His father was an engineer who worked on the construction of the Darjeeling railroad line which skirts the Himalayas. Durrell attended the College of St. Joseph in Darjeeling, and at the age of eleven, he was sent to England to continue his education at St. Edmund's School in Canterbury. This move was the first great change in his life, but his father's attempt to groom him as a member of the British ruling class did not succeed. After secondary school, according to Durrell's own

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Durrell's famous contemporaries include:

**Anaïs Nin** (1903–1977): Nin is best known for her erotica and for her seven-volume journal, which Henry Miller predicted would someday “take its place beside the revelations of St. Augustine, Petronius, [Pierre] Abelard, [Jean Jacques] Rousseau, [Marcel] Proust, and others.”

**Robertson Davies** (1913–1995): This Canadian novelist's work often deals with religion and metaphysics while interweaving theatrical elements with traditional novel forms.

**William Faulkner** (1897–1962): This American novelist often experimented not only with the limitations of the novel form but also with the use of dialect.

**Richard Nixon** (1913–1994): This U.S. president's time in office was marred by the Watergate scandal, which eventually forced Nixon to resign for fear of being impeached.

account, he deliberately failed the entrance examinations for Oxford four times, a conscious rebellion against his father. He became a jazz pianist at a London nightclub called The Blue Peter while aspiring to be a writer. After marrying artist Nancy Myers, Durrell completely devoted his energies to becoming a novelist.

Oppressed by the hardship of life in a grimy quarter of London, Durrell was also stung by the stifling pressure of British society on his artistic ambitions. In a letter he wrote, “England wrung my guts out of me and tried to destroy everything singular and unique in me.” In 1935, to escape “that mean, shabby little island,” Durrell went with his family to the island of Corfu, off the Adriatic coast of Greece. He wanted to live the life of an expatriate writer and to recreate the life of London in his novels, much as the expatriate James Joyce had done for Dublin. It was in Corfu that Durrell began reading the work of Henry Miller, whose work would have a major influence on the artist.

**Durrell's Muse** Durrell's discovery of the works of Henry Miller had a tremendous effect on his writing, and Durrell initiated a correspondence which was to continue until Miller's death. In 1938, after censorship problems had complicated its publication in the British Isles, Durrell's *The Black Book* appeared from Obelisk Press in Paris, and he became what he calls a “serious” writer. The novel established Durrell's reputation and drew lavish praise from Miller: “You've crossed the equator. Your commercial career is finished. From now on you're an outlaw, and I congratulate you with all the breath in my body. I seriously think that you truly are

‘the first Englishman!’” The success of the novel instilled in Durrell the confidence that he was on the right track artistically.

**The Alexandria Quartet** After a nineteen-year break in his novel-writing career, Durrell produced what would become the centerpiece of his career as a novelist: *The Alexandria Quartet*, comprised of *Justine*, *Balthazar*, *Mountolive*, and *Clea*. In this ambitious and intricate series of novels, Durrell attempted to create a fictional parallel of twentieth-century physics, based on the theories he had developed in his one book of literary criticism, *A Key to Modern British Poetry*. The books of *The Alexandria Quartet*, which Durrell called “an investigation of modern love,” are not sequential; rather, the first three books tell about the same events and characters in pre-World War II Alexandria, but from different viewpoints. The “facts” of the story of sexual liaisons and political intrigue are glimpsed only obliquely from the accounts of different narrators. There is, in a sense, no objective truth to be discovered. The fourth novel, *Clea*, is a more traditional chronological narrative which takes the characters through the war years.

**Other Genres** In addition to his novels, Durrell is noted for a series of works generally referred to as the “island books,” a hybrid genre incorporating autobiography and satiric social commentary. *Prospero's: A Guide to the Landscape and Manners of the Island of Corcyra* (1945) is an “island portrait” of Corfu, its geography, lore, customs, and eccentric inhabitants. Durrell's literary output also includes twelve volumes of poetry, three plays, several books of satiric sketches of diplomatic life, short stories, and collections of his correspondence with Henry Miller, Alfred Perles, and Richard Aldington. Durrell died of emphysema at his home in the village of Sommieres on November 7, 1990.

### Works in Literary Context

Durrell's writing career began during a period of formal experimentation in literature. Sensing the limitations of conventional novels and poetry, authors were trying to figure out how the human experience could be fully expressed in literature. Consequently, a narrator might attempt to recount the haphazard development of a human being's thoughts. Writers also began to push the limits of “decency,” describing with unflinching openness sexuality and sexual deviancy. Durrell primarily subscribed to these kinds of experimentation, though he also delved into some narrative design experimentation in his acclaimed *The Alexandria Quartet*.

**Rebel Writers and Formal Experimentation** One of the most significant influences on Durrell during his search for his own voice as a writer was Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*. Miller's 1934 novel, which introduced a frankness in subject matter and expression never seen before, was published in France, banned in England, and



immediately joined James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) as major books that were widely read "underground." Durrell was influenced by the innovations of all three writers: He admired Miller's openness, Joyce's formal experimentations, and Lawrence's erotic honesty and spirit of revolt. In *The Black Book*, Durrell deliberately tried to create a plot that would move in memory but remain static in linear time, radiating instead out into space. He referred to this principle that he would go on to refine in *The Alexandria Quartet* as "heraldic."

Indeed, *The Alexandria Quartet* was an experiment in form. The outer plot, a story of love, mystery, and spies, is narrated by a young writer who takes an archetypal journey to find love, self-knowledge, and his artistic voice. He writes a first novel *Justine* about a love affair in Alexandria, and then follows with *Balthazar*, which contradicts the first by quoting other people. Finally, after interjecting a third omniscient volume, *Mountolive*, revealing the "facts," the narrator adds a last novel—*Clea*—that moves forward in time toward his attainment of maturity and wisdom.

The form of the *Quartet* is intrinsic to the work; Durrell had been concerned for many years with how the new physics of space-time might apply to fiction, and insofar as *The Alexandria Quartet* experiments with the novel's limitations with regard to chronology and memory, it is easy to link it to William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). In this novel, the plot is developed in backward chronological order and is completely immersed in the dialect of the Deep South, thereby requiring readers to discover a new way to think in order to follow the details of the novel.

In fact, Durrell's experimentation with the interplay of memory and narrative has been effectively used to describe the way post-traumatic stress disorder affects Vietnam War veterans by contemporary writers. Novelists such as Tim O'Brien have helped modern readers understand that for those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, there are essentially two existences: the one in the here and the now and the one that is stuck in the traumatic events of the Vietnam War. Successful experimentation with memory and its effect on novel chronology does not merely describe this sensation; the reader actually has a sense of what it feels like to be living within two realities.

### Works in Critical Context

Although critics have differed widely in their assessments of Durrell's canon, they have never questioned the quality of the island books, but from the *Quartet* onward, contention swirled around his experiments with form, with characterization, with layering of ideas, and with language itself. Yet viewed as a whole, his work finally takes on, as John Unterecker said in *On Contemporary Literature*, a "marble constancy" all its own. It "fuses together into something that begins to feel like an organic whole."

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

*The Alexandria Quartet* retells its key events multiple times from different points of view. The idea here seems to be that, so long as stories are told by human beings, they are defined by their subjectivity; therefore, the stories will not be reliable sources of truth. Here are some other examples of artistic works that wrestle with the idea of subjectivity as it relates to truth:

*The Things They Carried* (1990), by Tim O'Brien. In this collection of short stories, Tim O'Brien describes the experiences of a soldier in the Vietnam War; however, it becomes clear that the events recounted are not "factually true" but only "emotionally true."

*Rashômon* (1950), a film by Akira Kurosawa. A tragic encounter between a bandit and a samurai and his wife is recounted several different ways by the participants and witnesses—including the dead samurai, who offers his testimony through a medium.

*The Indian Killer* (1996), by Sherman Alexie. In a traditional murder mystery novel form, Alexie introduces a new twist: Because the serial killer in this novel is never discovered, murder and fear continue to reign at the end of the novel, and the truth is never found.

**The Island Novels** Durrell's island novels, or landscape books, are drawn from the Greek world, but they are far more than travelogues or catalogues of places to visit. Much like the travel literature of Norman Douglas and D. H. Lawrence, they recreate the ambience of places loved, the characters of people known, and the history and mythology of each unique island world. The first three landscape books, *Prospero's Cell*, *Reflections on a Marine Venus*, and *Bitter Lemons* form a kind of trilogy mounting in intensity and power. *Prospero's Cell* is considered by critics to be the most beautiful of the three, evoking the Corfu of the young Durrell, his Greek friends, and the history of the island and resonates with myths from Homer to William Shakespeare and beyond.

In comparison, *Reflections on a Marine Venus* is a harsher, less romantic look at the life of the people of Rhodes immediately after the war. In *Reflections*, Durrell classified his love of islands as "Islomania": "This book is by intention a sort of anatomy of islomania, with all its formal defects of inconsequence and shapelessness." *Bitter Lemons* is critically seen to be the finest of Durrell's island studies and among the most outstanding of his works. Published in 1957, the book was written immediately after he returned to England from Cyprus, where his romance with Greece had been tragically strained by the island's nationalistic uprisings. The author's mixed emotions are expressed vividly in *Bitter Lemons*. In the *New*



*York Times Book Review*, Freya Stark praised its “integrity of purpose, . . . careful brilliant depth of language and . . . the feeling of destiny which pervades it,” declaring that the book elevated Durrell to the highest rank of writers.

***The Alexandria Quartet*** Well-read in Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung and in Sir James Frazer’s mythic theory, Durrell saw modern thought returning full circle to Far Eastern and Indian philosophy, and he wanted to weave all these concepts into the tapestry of *The Alexandria Quartet*. He explained in *Paris Review* that “Eastern and Western metaphysics are coming to a point of confluence in the most interesting way. It seems unlikely in a way, but nevertheless the two main architects of this breakthrough have been Einstein and Freud. . . . Well, this novel is a four-dimensional dance, a relativity poem.” Durrell’s concept of space-time has been greatly debated by critics of his work. Anthony Burgess contended in *The Novel Now*, that “To learn more and more as we go on is what we expect from any good novel, and we need no benefit of ‘relativity.’” In *Lawrence Durrell*, John Unterecker voiced the opposite: “The relativity theory involves a reorientation for the modern writer not only toward the materials of his art but also toward himself, his audience, his world.” In no sense a pretentious or superfluous theory imposed on the *Quartet*, space-time is, in many ways, the central structure of the work.

## Responses to Literature

1. Read *The Alexandria Quartet*. To what extent do you feel Durrell’s experimentation with form is successful? Consider specifically the use of repeated stories from different viewpoints.
2. Read at least two of Durrell’s island novels. In these novels, Durrell attempts to bring to life the myths, the geography, and the people of the islands he describes. Draft a short essay in which you describe the people, places, and myths of your hometown, considering Durrell’s work while you write.

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## ■ Friedrich Dürrenmatt

BORN: 1921, Konolfingen, Switzerland

DIED: 1990, Neuchâtel, Switzerland

NATIONALITY: Swiss

GENRE: Drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Romulus the Great* (1949)

*The Physicists* (1962)

*The Meteor* (1966)

*Play Strindberg* (1969)

*Achterloo* (1983)



Friedrich Dürrenmatt Keystone / Getty Images

## Overview

Friedrich Dürrenmatt was the leading German-language dramatist of his generation, after Bertolt Brecht. He dominated German, Austrian, and Swiss repertoires and was familiar to audiences throughout Europe, North America, and South America. When not directing the plays himself, he regularly participated in their production, revising and rewriting in consultation with actors up to the last minute; if the performance failed to affect the audience as he thought it should, he cast the text in a new version.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**An Early Artistic Talent** Friedrich Dürrenmatt was born on January 5, 1921, in the Emmental region of Switzerland to Reinhold Dürrenmatt, a pastor of the Konolfingen church, and Hulda Zimmermann Dürrenmatt. In 1933 Dürrenmatt entered the secondary school in the neighboring village of Grosshochstetten; he spent his spare time in the studio of a local painter, who encouraged him to indulge his passion for painting and drawing. He pursued this activity all his life and was twenty-three before he decided to concentrate on writing stories and plays and to make visual art an avocation.

**A Series of Interruptions in Studies** The family moved in 1935 to the city of Bern, where Dürrenmatt's father was appointed pastor of the Salem Hospital. Dürrenmatt was enrolled at the Freies Gymnasium, a Christian secondary school, where he lasted two and a half years before he was invited to leave. He transferred to a less rigorous private school, the Humboldtium, from which he regularly skipped class. He frequently attended the City Theater of Bern, where his uncle, a government official, held a reserved seat.

Upon graduating from high school, after being rejected by the Institute of Art, he enrolled at the University of Zurich, where for one semester he studied philosophy, literature, and natural science. He then became a student of philosophy at the University of Bern for a semester, tutoring in Greek and Latin to earn pocket money. His studies were interrupted—this time, not his fault—when he was called to military duty. Although Switzerland, with its linguistic and cultural melange of German, French, Italian, and Romansh, was neutral in World War II (1939–1945), it maintained a strong military, actively conscripting citizens as part of a plan to deter a potential (and, indeed, fully planned, though never materialized) German invasion. In 1942, Dürrenmatt returned to the University of Zurich for two semesters, spending most of his time in the company of painters and writing plays and stories. In 1943, though, he fell sick with hepatitis and returned home to Bern. He spent his final four semesters of university study there, concentrat-

ing on philosophy and contemplating the possibility of a doctoral dissertation on Søren Kierkegaard and tragedy.

**Marriage and Writing for the Basel Stage** In 1946, Dürrenmatt married actress Lotti Geissler. They settled in Basel in 1947, at about the time he was completing his first radio play, *The Double* (1960), which was turned down by Swiss Radio, and his first drama, *It Is Written* (1947). Opening night spectators in Zurich booed the latter; but reviewers recognized Dürrenmatt's powerful talent and potential, and he received a cash prize from the Welti Foundation to encourage him to continue writing. His second play, *The Blind Man* (1947), aroused neither outrage nor much interest in its initial production and was removed from the Basel repertoire after nine performances. Productions at two other theaters fared no better.

**The Humor of Classical History** On August 6, 1947, the Dürrenmatts' first child, Peter, was born. After the failure of *The Blind Man* the family could no longer afford to live in Basel, and they moved to Schernelz, where Lotti's mother, Frau Falb, had a home. Dürrenmatt was also helped financially by friends and anonymous patrons who wanted to foster his talent.

Before the move, though, he had agreed to provide the Basel theater with a play titled "The Building of the Tower of Babel"; the cast had been selected, and the manuscript had grown to four acts. But mature consideration forced him to destroy it. The play he quickly wrote instead, *Romulus the Great* (1949), became the first of his enduring theatrical successes. The work reflected Dürrenmatt's knowledge of Roman history and classical works and concerns the rule of Emperor Romulus Augustulus during the tail end of the Roman Empire. Although the work is not meant to be historically accurate, many of the details—such as the main character's obsession with rearing chickens—were taken from actual historical figures and events. The play was also produced in Zurich in 1948, and in 1949 it became the first major Dürrenmatt production in Germany when the Göttingen theater performed it. Critics were stingy with praise, objecting to the anachronisms and some of the comic effects, but the play became a standard in the German-speaking theater and beyond, perhaps not least because—after the tragedies of the Holocaust (in which Nazis deliberately murdered 6 million Jews and many others) and such Allied atrocities as the firebombing of Dresden—the German-speaking world was desperate for history with a hint of humor in it.

**Writing Detective Plays to Pay Avant-Garde Bills** Royalties did not yet amount to much, however, and the Falb household started to become cramped as the family grew by two daughters: Barbara and Ruth. Adding to expenses was Dürrenmatt's hospitalization for diabetes. He turned, then, in part to pay the rent on a house in the region of Ligerz in west-central Switzerland, to

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Dürrenmatt's famous contemporaries include:

**Bertolt Brecht** (1898–1956): The German playwright and theater director credited with developing the concept of "epic theater."

**Václav Havel** (1936–): A Czech playwright imprisoned for his opposition to the Czech government in the 1970s, Havel later served as president of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic from 1989 to 2003.

**Arthur Miller** (1915–2005): A Pulitzer Prize-winning American playwright, most famous for his plays *The Crucible* and *Death of a Salesman*.

**Jean-Paul Sartre** (1905–1980): A French philosopher and author known for his ideas of existentialism, or the belief that life has no objective meaning beyond an individual's own life-project.

**Toni Morrison** (1931–): A celebrated American author and professor, she is both a Pulitzer Prize- and Nobel Prize-winning author, the first black woman to win the latter.

writing detective novels—with great success. His income, augmented by royalties from radio plays, was great enough to make possible the purchase in 1952 of a house above the city of Neuchâtel in which he lived until his death. Dürrenmatt had completed the manuscript for *The Marriage of Mr. Mississippi* in 1950, only to have it rejected by Swiss theaters. Also in 1952, however, Hans Schweikart, manager of the Munich Intimate Theater, directed the premiere, establishing Dürrenmatt in Germany as an avant-garde dramatist. The play was praised by critics, although its follow-up, *An Angel Comes to Babylon* (1953), did not measure up to the first.

*The Physicists* (1963) proved to be another resounding success for Dürrenmatt. The play tells the story of a brilliant scientist who hides in an asylum and pretends to be insane in order to keep his potentially dangerous discoveries away from those in power, and in order to continue his research unmolested. The work reflects the unease that many people felt in the aftermath of World War II and during the height of the Cold War, when the efforts of scientists were increasingly applied to the development of instruments of destruction. Writing from historically neutral Switzerland, one can imagine how Dürrenmatt must have seen the United States and the Soviet Union—rivals in the Cold War and in the concomitant arms race—as paranoid, globe-spanning madmen. From the play's perspective, it is the cold war policy of MAD (mutually assured destruction: the idea that no one would want to launch the first nuclear missile

because both sides had the capacity to completely destroy one another) that ensures the evil results attendant on the physicists' mental exertions, though Dürrenmatt was also highly critical of scientists' irresponsibility for the application of their work.

***Strindberg, but Not Shakespeare*** *King John* (1968), based on William Shakespeare's *The Life and Death of King John* (c. 1595), was greeted enthusiastically, but Dürrenmatt's other Shakespeare adaptation, *Titus Andronicus* (1970), was a failure. The audience booed during the performance, and critical rejection was unanimous. Dürrenmatt's most successful adaptation was *Play Strindberg* (1969)—based on part 1 and the end of part 2 of August Strindberg's *Dance of Death* (1901). The piece has been played on major stages in Europe and America.

***Retiring from the Stage in Style*** Dürrenmatt's final drama, *Achterloo* (1983)—the title is a place name from a children's rhyme—underwent four revisions, the definitive one prepared especially for the 1988 Schwetzingen Festival. In 1988, though, Dürrenmatt announced his decision to abandon the theater, and two years later he died at his home, on December 14, 1990. Despite an up-and-down career as a playwright, he did not leave the stage without recognition. In his lifetime he won seventeen prestigious awards, was made honorary member at Ben-Gurion University in Israel in 1974, and earned an honorary doctorate from the University of Zurich in 1983. And his plays such as *The Visit* and *The Physicists* are still among the most frequently performed plays in the German-speaking world.

## Works in Literary Context

***Wide-Ranging Influences*** Dürrenmatt's complex works take inspiration from a multitude of sources: father and grandfather left their imprint on "the pastor's boy Fritzli," as he was called by the townspeople, in his intense preoccupation with religion, his conservative cast of mind, and the hard-hitting satire of his plays. The tales his father recounted from classical mythology and the Bible stories his mother told him provided material for many of his major works. And although his early plays such as *The Blind Man* suffered from philosophical and theological pretension, Dürrenmatt took influence from his intensive studies of the works of Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

***A Library of Styles*** For as many influences as there were on his playwriting, so were there that many styles and genres in which Dürrenmatt wrote—including individual and mixes of comedy, murder mystery, spy drama, love story, and intellectual pieces. *The Physicists* (1963), for instance, incorporates all of these—yet Dürrenmatt delivers the work in straightforward language that fits a tight Aristotelian structure still considered the basic plot structure today. As another clever device, he artfully lures

his audience into the trap of enjoying what seems to be a heartwarming happy ending, only to show it to be mere wishful thinking and a misperception of the hard truth that events will always take the worst imaginable turn.

### ***Disillusionment and the Decline of Humanity***

Like many of the thinkers he studied, and like many authors writing after World War II and the Holocaust, Dürrenmatt was concerned with the decline of humanity. Consistently there appear the tones of nihilism—or a belief in nothing—and the accompanying attitudes that suggest despair, anxiety, and hopelessness. In many of Dürrenmatt's plays, the heroic characters actively fight against the worst impulses of the human condition and fail. This is shown in *The Visit*, where the teacher—the last holdout arguing against the murder of the man who drove off Claire—finally succumbs to the overwhelming greed of the majority. This play has also been read as a response to the pervasive poverty in Europe after the Second World War, and to the U.S. Marshall Plan for reconstruction of Europe—though Dürrenmatt himself often warned against reading his characters as symbols, noting, “Misunderstandings creep in, because people desperately search the hen yard of my drama for the egg of explanation which I steadfastly refuse to lay.”

### **Works in Critical Context**

Dürrenmatt's most popular plays, especially *The Visit* (1956) and *The Physicists* (1962), made him the darling of theater people and critics. But as directing styles changed and texts came to be seen as mere raw material, Dürrenmatt began to complain of inadequate performances of his works. He also found reviewers rejecting his work because it seemed uncommitted when compared to the activist message plays and documentaries that began to appear in the late 1960s. Germany in particular experienced a strong surge in literary activism as the “68ers,” the student activists who protested frequently in 1968 for a more just and equitable society, came to dominate the arts world. Several of Dürrenmatt's works held up under the criticism, however. One such play is *The Meteor*.

***The Meteor* (1966)** A mix of farce and the macabre, the play offers one magnificent role in its central character and several challenging secondary ones: On a seemingly endless hot, sunny midsummer day, visitors climb the stairs to the stuffy garret where Nobel Prize-winning playwright Wolfgang Schwitter starved as a young artist and where he has chosen to try to die after failing to do so in the hospital. He is irritable and says unexpected and hurtful things to those who confront him; it seems that the “resurrected” behave in an unfettered, demonic way, bringing out the worst in others.

Most critics have admired Dürrenmatt's imaginative power, even those who do not know what to make of the final scene: One thought it a failed effort at profundity, others found it anticlimactic, and a few objected to the irreverence toward the Salvation Army. Such criticism was

## **COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE**

Here are a few works by writers who also wrote about the futility of solving humanity's problems:

*The Bald Soprano* (1950), a play by Eugène Ionesco. In this work, wives do not know their husbands, local visitors are misunderstood, and everyone is unnerved.

*Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956), a play by Eugene O'Neill. In this modern drama, excruciatingly close focus is put on the dysfunctional Tyrone family.

*Marat/Sade* (1963), a play by Peter Weiss. In the tradition of Antonin Artaud, the playwright offers a bloody, provocative examination of human suffering.

*Waiting for Godot* (1953), a play by Samuel Beckett. This play is a stark and daunting exploration of human cruelty, human tolerance, and human perception.

particularly galling to Dürrenmatt, who never tired of demonstrating in his plays the severe damage done by ideologies and their true believers. More recently, critic Roger Crockett has suggested in *Understanding Friedrich Dürrenmatt* that “Dürrenmatt's characters are most often involved in some form of game, and understanding how and why they play is a big part of understanding the author.” That Dürrenmatt “has largely been neglected in the English-speaking world in recent years,” argues literary scholar Kenneth Northcott, “reflects a regrettable insularity on the part of the theatrical world of the United States in particular.”

### **Responses to Literature**

1. Although Dürrenmatt's plays often focus on the darkest parts of human nature, he has pointed out that they are meant to be comedies. Read *The Visit*. Do you think comedy is an effective way of addressing humanity's faults? Why or why not? In your opinion, does *The Visit* succeed as comedy? Support your opinion with examples from the work.
2. In several of his plays, Dürrenmatt performs a study of opposites. Consider one or more of his works and identify the opposing forces or characters. How are they different? Where is the tension most obvious? Is one “side” more likeable, or more sympathetic?
3. How does Dürrenmatt's play *The Physicists* reflect European anxieties during the cold war? Provide a brief description of the cold war in order to better focus your analysis of the play.
4. In an interview conducted by Violet Ketels at Temple University, Dürrenmatt recounts how he studied philosophy and theology for ten semesters. In *It Is*

*Written*, he describes a spiritual crisis. Where in a Dürrenmatt work is there evidence of his sense of a god? How does that play reveal his attitudes about that god, and what do these attitudes seem to be?

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## ▣ Umberto Eco

BORN: 1932, *Alessandria, Italy*

NATIONALITY: *Italian*

GENRE: *Fiction, nonfiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Name of the Rose* (1980)

*Foucault's Pendulum* (1989)

*The Island of the Day Before* (1995)

*Baudolino* (2000)

*The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (2004)

### Overview

The long list of Umberto Eco's books and publications contains only a handful of novels, with the first two, *The Name of the Rose* (1980) and *Foucault's Pendulum* (1989), being his best known. Despite Eco's relatively



Umberto Eco Eco, Umberto, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

scarce output, these novels' remarkable international success has made him the most famous Italian novelist writing today. Before the appearance of his first novel, Eco, a man of encyclopedic learning, was already well known for his contributions to the discipline of semiotics, or the study of how meaning is communicated, as a prolific author of books and essays on a wide range of scholarly subjects, and as a gifted writer on politics and popular culture. His novels and other writings have been translated into many languages, and he has lectured and taught at universities all over the world.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Background in Aesthetics, Semiotics, and Architecture** Umberto Eco was born at Alessandria, in Piemonte, Italy, on January 5, 1932. During World War II, he and his mother retreated to the mountainside area of Piedmontese. Originally an accountant at a firm that manufactured bathtubs, Eco's father served in three wars for the Italian army. Eco's early education was Salesian, a school of thought based on a Roman Catholic religious order established in the nineteenth century. Ultimately, Eco renounced Catholicism later in life after experiencing ambivalence about his faith. The first in his family to attend a university, Eco studied at the University of



Turin, graduating in 1954 with a degree in philosophy. At Turin he came under the lasting influence of the philosopher Luigi Pareyson, under whose guidance he wrote his thesis, which became his first published book, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas* (1956).

In 1961, Eco received his Libera Docenza (a degree that is roughly equivalent to a doctor of philosophy) in aesthetics, and from that year until 1964 he held the position of lecturer in aesthetics at both the University of Turin and the Politecnico in Milan. He was appointed professor of visual communication at the University of Florence in 1966, and in 1969 he returned to the Politecnico as a professor of semiotics. Although one might be tempted to associate Eco with the conventional notion of “arts and letters,” during his years at Florence and the Politecnico he was in fact a member of the faculty of architecture. *The Absent Structure: Introduction to the Study of Semiotics* (1968) contains an extended treatment of architecture as a medium of communication, a subject to which he has returned throughout his career.

**Success as a Novelist: Fame and Fortune** While pursuing his highly successful university career, Eco was not confined by his academic roles. By the end of the 1970s Eco was well known as a critic, a journalist, and a politically involved intellectual. No one, however, could have predicted the great leap in his fame—and fortune—that would follow the appearance of *The Name of the Rose* in 1980. Set in a northern Italian monastery of the fourteenth century, the novel is replete with literary, philosophical, theological, and historical arcana, and is punctuated by many passages in Latin and other languages. The book sold more than 1 million copies in Italy, where it won several prizes, among them the highly regarded Premio Strega. Translated into French in 1982, it became a best seller in France, winning the Prix Médicis. *The Name of the Rose* was translated into English in 1983, and in the United States, the hardcover edition remained on the best-seller list for forty weeks, ultimately selling more than one million copies. The paperback rights brought \$550,000, reputed to be the largest sum of money ever paid for a paperback translation, and sales of the paperback edition exceeded eight hundred thousand copies within the first three months after its appearance. *The Name of the Rose* has been translated into more than thirty-six languages, including Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Turkish, and Arabic. A motion picture version directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud was released in 1986. Within a few years after the publication of his first novel, Umberto Eco had become one of the most well-known writers in the world.

**Success as a Catalyst to Creative Output** Maintaining the momentum he gathered during his success in the 1980s, Eco has continued to publish novels, philosophical texts, and children’s books, in addition to his scholarly publications. His recent literary works include *The Island of the Day Before* (1995), *Baudolino*

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Eco’s famous contemporaries include:

**Italo Calvino** (1923–1985): Nobel Prize–winning Italian writer and folklorist, Calvino is the most translated Italian writer of the twentieth century. His early work has been classified as magic realism; his later work is perhaps better described as postmodern.

**Claude Lévi-Strauss** (1908–): French anthropologist, his theory of structuralism is an attempt to describe and understand human society. Lévi-Strauss’s thoughts have been widely adopted by both philosophers and postmodern authors.

**Ian Fleming** (1908–1964): Author of the James Bond canon of spy novels, as well as the children’s book *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, Fleming was himself an intelligence operative during the Second World War.

**Jorge Luis Borges** (1899–1986): Perhaps the best known of the Latin American “boom” authors of the mid-twentieth century, Borges was a fiction writer, thinker, historian, anthropologist, and critic.

**Alcide De Gasperi** (1881–1954): Italian politician recognized today as one of the founding fathers of the European Union.

(2001), and *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (2005), and *On Ugliness* (2007).

**Success as a Catalyst to Scholarship** The success of his novels and the steady progress of his scholarly work brought Eco the highest academic and public distinctions. All the while, Eco remained fully involved in the academic pursuits to which he was devoted before he became famous. His scholarly and theoretical writing continues unabated, as does his commitment to the progress of semiotics. He remains the editor of *Versus* and continues to serve on the editorial boards of other journals. At the same time, the enormous success of his novels has greatly intensified academic interest in his work. His fame as a novelist has led to an exponential increase in invitations to lecture and teach at institutions all over the world. He currently holds over thirty honorary doctorate degrees from prestigious universities around the world.

### Works in Literary Context

As a semiotician, novelist, medieval scholar, journalist, and parodist, Eco has produced an amazingly diverse and influential body of work since the 1950s, and he is certainly one of the most prominent public intellectuals in the world. Authors of notable influence on Eco include James Joyce, Jorge Luis Borges, Charles Pierce, Immanuel Kant, and Aristotle.



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Eco is hardly the only author to center his tales on deep, arcane conspiracies. Other notable works to touch upon such a theme include:

*The Book of the SubGenius* (1983), a book by J. R. "Bob" Dobbs. This work is a compilation of bizarre, humorous, and sometimes disturbing ramblings of the Church of the SubGenius, a surrealist collective, which takes on conspiracy theories, New Age gurus, American arcana, and other sacred cows.

*The Illuminatus! Trilogy* (1975), novels by Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson. This postmodern trilogy of novels simultaneously satirizes and celebrates the topsy-turvy world of modern conspiracy theories. Many of the trilogy's ideas have since become canonical among conspiracy theorists, an idea Eco would revisit in *Foucault's Pendulum*.

*The Da Vinci Code* (2003), a novel by Dan Brown. One of the best-selling books of all time, Brown's conspiracy-detective novel covers similar ground to *Foucault's Pendulum*.

**Factual Fiction** One trait found throughout Eco's fictional works is an abundance of factual information related to the many fields that interest the author, from history to architecture to language. In his 1990 article "Pendulum Diary," William Weaver, who had translated all three of Eco's novels into English, remarks on the tremendous amount of "sheer information" that Eco puts into his fiction, noting that *Foucault's Pendulum*, like its predecessor, is marked by elaborate and abstruse references, extravagant linguistic play, and a formidable number of quotations.

### *The Battle Between Tradition and Modernism*

Set in a Benedictine abbey in northern Italy in the year 1327, Eco's first novel, *The Name of the Rose*, is both an elaborately detailed medieval detective drama and a semiotic novel of ideas. When several monks are murdered in a sequence echoing the biblical prophecies of the Apocalypse, Brother William of Baskerville is summoned to apply his enlightened deductive powers to solve the mystery. From this central scenario, Eco creates a conflict between the modern values of rationality and humor, represented by William, and the superstition and severity of the Middle Ages, as embodied by Jorge de Burgos, the blind and aged guardian of the abbey's labyrinthine library. A maze of literal and metaphoric possibilities and obstacles, the library conceals the key to the mystery—a collection of heretical texts considered so incendiary that their discovery prompts several murders.

William's search for truth is confounded by stubborn authorities, including officials of the Inquisition, and this conflict reflects differences between modern humanism and absolute submission to the Church.

**Imagined Conspiracies** While *The Name of the Rose* moves forward from the Middle Ages to the intellectual issues of the twentieth century, *Foucault's Pendulum* moves backward, confronting the reader with an avalanche of arcane learning about such subjects as the Knights Templar, the Cabala, and the Rosicrucians. In *Foucault's Pendulum*, Eco extends the scope of his metaphysical study to include many of the historical and religious mysteries of the last two millennia. Although the novel revolves around a seedy publishing house in contemporary Milan, it examines mystical phenomena from Stonehenge to the Crusaders' Jerusalem to exotic rituals in modern Brazil. Three editors involved in publishing texts dealing with occultism and esoteric practices are supplied a manuscript by a man they believe is a charlatan. With the aid of a computer and some quixotic analogies, they create a six-hundred-year web of arcane correlations linking the Templars' secret to the motives of such historical figures as the Benedictines, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Adolf Hitler. As they reinterpret most of human history to fit their theoretical matrix, the three editors begin to believe their own fabrication and, as ardent occultists learn of the secret, this eventually results in murder and human sacrifice. While the novel follows the myriad twists of the editors' inner trains of thought, it finally condemns their illogical folly.

In the years since his success in the 1980s there has been an explosion in the number of doctoral dissertations written on Eco's work, with the novels being their principal concern. While his influence on the most recent generation of intellectuals, philosophers, and artists remains to be seen in full, there can be little doubt that he occupies a central place in the geography of contemporary Italian letters.

### Works in Critical Context

The success of his novels and the steady progress of his scholarly work throughout the 1980s brought Eco the highest academic and public distinctions. In 1983 the Rotary Club of Florence honored him with its Columbus Award, and in 1985 he was made a commander of France's Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. In the same year he also received the Marshall McLuhan Award from UNESCO Canada and Teleglobe. Since 1985 universities throughout the world have awarded him twenty-four honorary degrees. Critics, however, have offered varying responses to two of his major works.

**The Name of the Rose** Critics lauded Eco's ingenious plot and challenging intellectual discourse. Franco Ferrucci observed: "The narrative impulse that commands the story is irresistible. That is no mean feat for a book in which many pages describe ecclesiastical councils or

theological debates. . . . Yet Mr. Eco's delight in his narrative does not fail to touch the reader." Despite its occasionally cerebral tone and frequent Latin quotations, *The Name of the Rose* achieved widespread international popularity and was adapted for film in 1983.

**Foucault's Pendulum** Reviewers offered widely divergent interpretations of the novel. Some critics denounced Eco's allusive style as laborious, encyclopedic, and inappropriate for the novelistic form. Author Salman Rushdie remarked: "[*Foucault's Pendulum*] is humourless, devoid of character, entirely free of anything resembling a credible spoken word, and mind-numbingly full of gobbledygook of all sorts." Other reviewers, however, extolled Eco's metaphysical inquiry. Joseph Coates commented: "[Eco's] plot can be read as a metaphor for modern science or for the whole manipulative arrogance of Western thought (as opposed to the message of Eastern religions) according to which man must master and exploit nature—and ultimately destroy it. With this book, Eco puts himself in the grand and acerbic tradition of Petronius, François Rabelais, Jonathan Swift and Voltaire."

## Responses to Literature

1. Identify the most striking conventions of the detective story. What do readers expect to find when they read a mystery? How does Eco meet or subvert these expectations in *The Name of the Rose*?
2. Construct a time line of the major historical events in Western Europe in the fourteenth century. How do these events play a role in *The Name of the Rose*? How does having knowledge of medieval history affect your reading of *The Name of the Rose*?
3. *Foucault's Pendulum* features an invented conspiracy that turns out to be real. As an exercise, invent a conspiracy of your own; choose a selection of individuals and organizations that do not seem to be connected to each other to act as puppets of your conspiracy. What goal does your conspiracy work toward? How does it use its puppets to further its aims?
4. Compare the film version of *The Name of the Rose* to the book. Do Eco's themes come across in the movie? What elements of the book are minimized or left out of the film?

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## Gunnar Ekelöf

BORN: 1907, Stockholm, Sweden

DIED: 1968, Sigtuna, Sweden

NATIONALITY: Swedish

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Late Arrival on Earth* (1932)

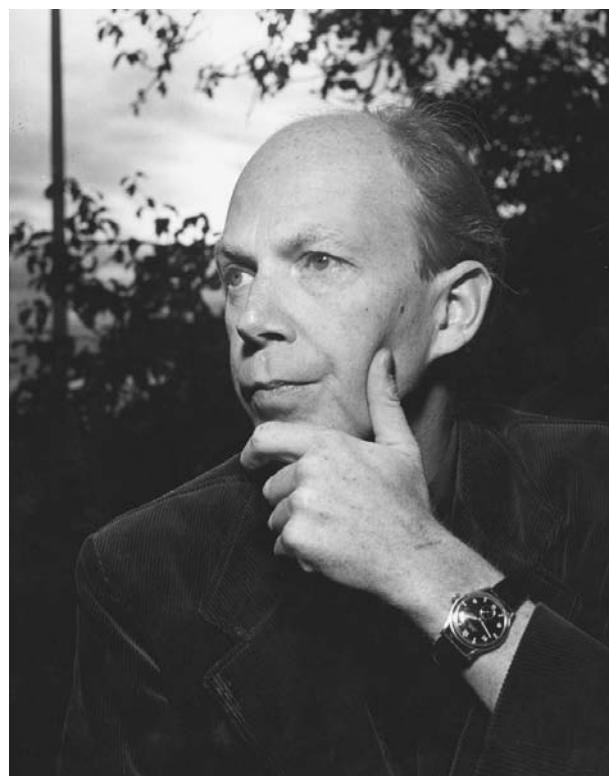
*Sorrow and the Star* (1936)

*Buy the Blind Man's Song* (1938)

*Ferry Song* (1941)

*In the Autumn* (1951)

*A Mölna Elegy* (1960)



Gunnar Ekelöf Das Fotoarchiv

## Overview

Gunnar Ekelöf is often described as the most important poet of modern Swedish literature. His poetry is regarded as innovative in form and technique, especially in its adaptation of musical forms to verse. Some believe Ekelöf's poetry will have a lasting place in the history of literature because of its originality and its relevancy to the problems of the modern age.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***Privileged but Difficult Beginnings*** On the surface at least, Bengt Gunnar Ekelöf's childhood was privileged. He was born in Stockholm on September 15, 1907. Ekelöf's mother, Valborg, née von Hardenberg, belonged to a solid, upper-class family dating back five generations. His father, Gerhard Ekelöf, was from an extremely poor background with roots in the southern Swedish province of Småland. Gerhard Ekelöf had come to Stockholm as a trained typographer but made a brilliant career for himself as a stockbroker. By the first few years of the twentieth century, he had become a multimillionaire.

Below the surface of upper-class wealth and privilege, however, Ekelöf's family home was marked by conflicts. Ekelöf's father was the indulgent parent, generous with his son, while his mother felt called upon to play the authoritarian role and to be the disciplinarian. Young Ekelöf seems to have been strongly attached to his father while his relationship with his mother was ambivalent from the outset.

***Family Illness and Schooling Abroad*** Valborg Ekelöf was more interested in traveling, staying in fashionable places, and pursuing her affairs with men than in ensuring a suitable environment for her sensitive and emotionally demanding only child. As a result, young Ekelöf spent a good deal of his childhood in private schools or under the tutelage of adult relatives. This lack of mothering and his accompanying sense of homelessness can explain why the motif of the Virgin Mary (the mother of Jesus Christ) came to play such an important part in Ekelöf's work.

In 1910, Gerhard Ekelöf revealed that he had contracted syphilis through contact with a prostitute in the 1890s. This revelation led to open conflict with his wife, from whom he had withheld the information. The sexually transmitted disease had no cure until 1911 when Salvarsan came on the market, so it progressed in him and by 1913 had reached its advanced stages of total paralysis. Ekelöf describes the progressive debilitation of his father and the eerie atmosphere of his childhood home in the moving autobiographical essay "A Photograph," first published in *Bonniers Litterära Magasin* in 1956.

At school in Stockholm, Ekelöf received the traditional European classical education, with studies in

Greek, Latin, and modern languages, but there were few signs of his future brilliance as an artist. He was, however, able to read Greek and Latin writers in their original languages and was a competent translator of writers as difficult as Sappho and Petronius. He used these skills to write book-length satires of the literary establishment and Western Christian culture as a student.

***Worldly Studies*** After completing his school-leaving certificate by the narrowest of margins, Ekelöf went to London in 1926 to study Persian and Hindustani, but he returned shortly thereafter to Uppsala, Sweden, where he unsuccessfully continued formal Oriental studies. The years following Ekelöf's graduation from the gymnasium were marked by uncertainty, emotional crises, and general aimlessness. He spent the next few years wandering around Europe, playing the dandy, dreaming of owning a coffee plantation in Kenya, and speculating on the unstable stock market with his inheritance. His important but troubled sojourn in Paris in 1929 and 1930, supposedly to study music and become a classical pianist, was a time of inner chaos, alcohol abuse, and suicidal urges. There, however, he came in contact with French modernism and began composing drafts of *Late Arrival on Earth*.

Ekelöf lost his inheritance in the so-called Kreuger crash of the early 1930s. By this time period, the world economy was suffering as the Great Depression took hold in the United States and spread to the rest of the world. The Kreuger crash was the Swedish equivalent of the Wall Street crash in the United States, as wealthy industrialist Ivar Kreuger committed fraud to secure massive bank loans later discovered by the Swedish government around the time Kreuger committed suicide. This financial situation forced Ekelöf to come to grips with the problem of economic survival in a Europe that was slowly moving toward the brink of economic and social collapse in the post-World War I period.

***Return to Sweden*** Ekelöf's return to Sweden in 1930 marked the last time he seriously thought of escape from there forever, although all his life he harbored a love-hate relationship for his homeland. A disastrous impulsive marriage to Gunnel Bergström in 1932 ended quickly and unhappily when his wife left him for the writer Karin Boye. Ekelöf's pioneering early poetry collection *Late Arrival on Earth* was published that same year and was the fruit of the author's Paris stay. It brought him in contact with the currents of European modernism (an early to mid-twentieth-century literary movement that represented a self-conscious break with traditional forms and subject matter and a search for a distinctly contemporary mode of expression). However, in the retrospective assessment of his writing, Ekelöf refers to *Late Arrival* as a one expressive of his youthful, morose state of mind at the time. *Late Arrival* was, however, something so new and revolutionary, at least in the Swedish context, that it continues to fascinate readers. Throughout his literary life Ekelöf constantly returned to the

original manuscripts to gain new ideas and impulses for later works.

**Personal Poetic Breakthrough** Ekelöf's next two collections, *Sorrow and the Star* (1936) and *Buy the Blind Man's Song* (1938), were favorably reviewed despite the conservatism of critics of the time. But his next work, *Ferry Song* (1941), was regarded by critics and Ekelöf himself as his personal breakthrough. Ekelöf created these works as World War II raged in much of Europe as many countries, including Great Britain, fought to contain the territorial aspirations of Nazi Germany, led by Adolf Hitler. Sweden was officially neutral, but because of its proximity to other Scandinavian countries such as Norway, which became controlled by Germany, it played a role in the conflict. Sweden both served as a haven for refugees from the Nazis and allowed Germany to transport troops through its territory to Nazi-controlled Norway.

Continuing to write in the post-war period, Ekelöf looked to the avant-garde. Following the success of *Ferry Song*, the long poem "Voices from Underground" from the 1951 collection *In the Autumn* became Ekelöf's most successful and best-known attempt to describe poetically a passage into the world of dreams—and, incidentally, into the world of surrealism. Surrealism was an early twentieth-century movement of art and literature that explored the subconscious and often featured dreamlike, if not illogical, juxtapositions of imagery.

**New Travels, New Genres** Ekelöf's "anti-poet" phase is represented by his next three collections. In these works, Ekelöf expanded his genres to fables, word-juggling nonsense verse, parodies, grotesques, dream accounts, and travel poems based on his frequent visits to Italy. During this period, Ekelöf also developed his notion of "poetry in things," a term that he borrowed from his compatriot Carl Jonas Love Almqvist, who emphasized the increasing value of concrete things and the decreasing value of words.

**The Twenty-Three-Year Opus** In 1960, Ekelöf published *A Mölna Elegy*—a work that has since been called the most advanced experiment in the use of the "quotation-allusion" technique in Swedish literature. Given the fact that *A Mölna Elegy* was a work in progress over some twenty-three years, it is hardly surprising that the published version came as an anticlimax to many critics, some of whom had developed excessive expectations about the poem.

**Inspiration in Istanbul** Ekelöf regarded himself as a poet in the style of Paul Valéry, a diligent worker in the habit of producing sometimes fifty to one hundred drafts of a poem. Furthermore, in his essay "From a Poet's Workshop" (1951), he expresses great skepticism about the reality of so-called poetic inspiration, even in the case of such improvisational geniuses as his fellow countryman, eighteenth-century poet and songwriter Carl

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ekelöf's famous contemporaries include:

**Josephine Baker** (1906–1975): African American expatriate dancer and singer who became an international celebrity and is regarded as the first African American woman to star in a major motion picture.

**Simone de Beauvoir** (1908–1986): French author and metaphysical philosopher, she laid the foundations for early feminism with her writing.

**Rachel Carson** (1907–1964): American marine biologist, environmentalist, naturalist, and science writer whose work *Silent Spring* (1962) was instrumental in the advent of global environmentalism.

**Zora Neale Hurston** (1903–1960): African American writer and folklorist who paved the way during the Harlem Renaissance for future African American women writers.

**Jean-Paul Sartre** (1905–1980): French philosopher, writer, and critic who is often attributed with pioneering modern existentialism.

Michael Bellman. The wave of poetic inspiration that came over Ekelöf in a hotel room in Istanbul in 1965 and out of which grew the trilogy *Diwan over the Prince of Emgion* (1965), *The Tale of Fatumeh* (1966), and *Guide to the Underworld* (1967) must therefore have been all the more surprising to the author himself.

**Final Serious Illness** In 1967, after a series of illnesses but no successful diagnosis, Ekelöf was finally discovered to be suffering from cancer of the esophagus. He died at his home in Sigtuna on March 16, 1968. In *A Mölna Elegy*, Ekelöf had written: "No, let me be cast into the sea / without cannonball, without banner / slowly disintegrate integrate / No, just be burnt to ashes / and cast into the sea." In 1965 Gunnar and Ingrid Ekelöf had visited the ancient city of Sardis in Turkey and walked along the river Paktolos. Ekelöf's ashes were strewn over the waters of the Paktolos.

## Works in Literary Context

**Influence on Style** Ekelöf's work, both difficult and demanding, reflects the influences of the mystical poetry of Persia and the Orient, Taoist and Indian mysticism, and movements of French Symbolism (where individual elements take on primary significance) and surrealism (where strange, dreamlike qualities characterize the images). *Dedication*, for example, reflects the influence of French Symbolism in that the author portrays himself as an interpreter, or "seer," one whose vision and insight

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Ekelöf's involvement with surrealist, dreamlike poetry had a profound impact on Swedish literature. Here are a few works by writers who have also influenced literature with similar efforts:

*The Automatic Message* (1933) by André Breton. In this important nonfiction treatise, the author discusses automatism (automatic writing) in the context of surrealism.

*Blood and Guts in High School* (1984) by Kathy Acker. This popular novel—one of the author's best-selling works—is representative of the modern experimental novel.

*Last Nights of Paris* (1929) by Philippe Soupault. This short surrealist novel features a protagonist obsessed with a woman who takes him deep into the underworld of Paris in the 1920s.

*Djinn* (1981) by Alain Robbe-Grillet. Using the form of the detective novel, as well as many liberties in regard to point of view, Robbe-Grillet creates a surrealist adventure featuring the character Simon Lecoeur and his vivacious love interest, Djinn.

extends beyond the perimeters of surface reality. This poetry collection shows the author groping in symbols toward the truth he believes lies beyond reality. *Ferry Song* shows the influence of Symbolism and romanticism in its style. Ekelöf attempts to reconcile the ideal and the real. He examines the natures of both self and reality and questions whether traditional ideas about self and reality are valid.

### *Struggles between Ideal and Real, Good and Evil*

In his examination of the ideal and real, Ekelöf comes to a certain conclusion. He finds that we live in a world where the forms of reality come solely from the compulsions of persons caught in the suffocating battle between good and evil. For him, there are the moralists, who help to perpetuate the good/evil system, who take sides and create forms and structures to aid their cause. There are also the uncommitted, who recognize but refuse to participate in the war between good and evil. By withdrawing from the struggle that structures all cultures and societies, however, the uncommitted must pay the price of complete isolation.

This kind of modern argument challenges readers to abandon their conventional perceptions of both poetry and reality. As is true of the work of the surrealists, Ekelöf's poetry also urges readers to explore the role of their subconscious (that part of the mind that dreams, for example) in their thinking. In keeping with this aim, his work is often filled with fantastic, dreamlike images and

symbols that mock rational (or conscious) thought. It is against this background of thought that reality and self emerge as Ekelöf's major concerns, and freedom from the "idea" (from the mental struggle) of good versus evil becomes his primary goal.

## Works in Critical Context

Critics today describe Ekelöf as a profound thinker and praise his ability to incorporate diverse influences into a coherent pattern of thought. Some also marvel that he remained, in spite of these influences, a distinctly Swedish poet in that the landscapes and aura of his native country haunt most of his work. Early critics, however, had more diverse responses to his work, indicating the uncertainty during this period about the role surrealism would play in modern culture.

***Late Arrival on Earth*** The original reception of this work by professional critics was overwhelmingly negative and dismissive. The style of the work and its abstractness alienated and confounded the readers of the time, and Ekelöf was branded as a surrealist, something that he later denied. In *Late Arrival*, Ekelöf abandons sonnet structure and the conventional verse line for free, associative prose poems somewhat reminiscent of Arthur Rimbaud. No capital letters appear in the poems, punctuation is used sparingly, and inanimate objects are personified: "the flowers doze in the window and the lamp gazes light / the window gazes with thoughtless eyes out into the dark / paintings exhibit without the soul the thought confided to them / and houseflies stand still on the walls and think."

*Late Arrival*, despite appearances, is a work of great artistic deliberateness, one that performs a balancing act between the two poles of feeling and calculation, free association and a strict application of musical principles to poetry. In short, what Ekelöf succeeded in doing in his first poetry collection was to free words of their job of referring and to create freestanding verbal constructs of great density and musicality, which transformed the language of twentieth-century Swedish poetry.

While many contemporary critics praise Ekelöf's complex poetic innovations, they also note problems of translation. Thus, remarks Leif Sjöberg in his *Reader's Guide*, "Some sensitive English speaking readers of Ekelöf's poetry are put off, because he is allegedly 'strange' or 'weird'" As Joseph Garrison concludes in his *Library Journal* review of Bly's *Friends, You Drank Some Darkness*, Ekelöf's "radical" works in translation "should be read carefully, very carefully."

## Responses to Literature

1. Ekelöf had great interest in history and the influence of the past. Discuss where this interest is reflected in his poetry, using examples from the text (poem or collection) you choose.



2. Ekelöf's *Ferry Song* came about during one of the bleakest periods in European history, when communist and fascist forces were taking hold of large parts of Europe. With a partner, do a Web search for information on either communism or fascism, and find evidence (if possible) of these forces' impact on the poet's work.
3. Go to the Louvre or another major metropolitan museum online. Look at surrealist art such as that of Salvador Dalí, Giorgio De Chirico, Edgar Jené, or Max Ernst. Discuss with others what you find to be surrealist about their work (or a particular work). Then, using the same list of surrealist characteristics, find as many incidences of surrealism as you can in Ekelöf's work. For example, what is dreamlike in his writing? Discuss with others, so that you might each point out something the others in the group did not see and so you can collectively come up with your own understanding of surrealism.

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## Cyprian Ekwensi

BORN: 1921, Minna, Nigeria

DIED: 2007, Enugu, Nigeria

NATIONALITY: Nigerian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*People of the City* (1954)

*Jagua Nana* (1961)

*Burning Grass* (1961)

*Divided We Stand* (1981)

### Overview

Cyprian Ekwensi is regarded as the father of the modern Nigerian novel. Although he wrote for both children and adults, he is especially well known for his stories for young people.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***The Nigeria of Ekwensi's Youth*** Born in Northern Nigeria in 1921, Ekwensi grew up in various cities and had numerous opportunities to observe the "urban politics" of Nigeria. The region had been designated as a British protectorate in 1901, and the culture quickly became a mix of traditional African and modern European influences; this mix was not always harmonious, and throughout the first half of the twentieth century, many Nigerians called for independence from England.



Cyprian Ekwensi Ekwensi, Cyprian, photograph. The Library of Congress.



## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ekwensi's famous contemporaries include:

**Isaac Asimov** (1920–1992): This Russian-born author wrote a great number of science fiction novels.

**Arthur C. Clarke** (1917–): This British science fiction author collaborated with Stanley Kubrick on the immensely popular film *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

**Chinua Achebe** (1930–): Nigerian novelist whose English-language novel *Things Fall Apart* is the most widely read work of African literature ever written.

**Thea Astley** (1925–2004): This Australian novelist won one of her nation's major literary awards, the Miles Franklin Award, repeatedly.

Ekwensi received his secondary education at the Higher College in Yaba and in Ibadan at Government College, his postsecondary education at Achimota College in Ghana, the School of Forestry in Ibadan, and the Chelsea School of Pharmacy at London University. In the early 1940s, Ekwensi taught English, biology, and chemistry at Igbobi College near Lagos. Ekwensi began writing at the end of World War II. His first stories were about his father, eulogizing his unequalled bravery as an adventurous elephant hunter and his skill as a carpenter. Ekwensi's first collection of short stories, *Ikolo the Wrestler, and Other Ibo Tales*, was published in 1947. In 1949 he accepted a teaching position at the Lagos School of Pharmacy.

**Government Positions and Civil Strife** Despite his professional qualifications in pharmacy, Ekwensi joined the news media in 1951, working for the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. That same year Ekwensi won a government scholarship for further studies in pharmacy at London University. It was on the ship that took him from Nigeria to England that Ekwensi wrote *People of the City*, uniting those stories he had broadcast on Radio Nigeria into one long story. At the end of the fourteen days during which Ekwensi had secluded himself inside his cabin on the ship, he had completed his first major literary creation. Originally entitled *Lajide of Lagos*, Andrew Dakers published it as *People of the City* in 1954. In addition to being Ekwensi's first major novel, *People of the City* has the distinction of being the first West African English novel written in a modern style.

**Nigerian Independence** Nigeria finally gained its independence in 1960, and in 1961 Ekwensi was named federal director of information—a position in which he controlled all Nigerian media, including film, radio, television, printing, newspapers, and public relations. In that

same year, he published *Jagua Nana*, his most popular novel. In 1967 he joined the Biafran secession as the chairman of the Bureau for External Publicity and director of Biafra Radio. The Biafran secession occurred when an eastern region of the country dominated by the Igbo people, who experienced much persecution at the hands of other ethnic groups in the country, declared the area of Biafra as an independent state. This led to a civil war that lasted until 1970 and resulted in the defeat of the Igbo secessionists.

Throughout his career, Ekwensi pursued his diverse vocational interests: teacher, journalist, pharmacist, diplomat, businessman, company director, public relations consultant, photographer, artist, information consultant, writer, and general shaper of public opinion. In 1991 he was appointed chairman of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria. Ekwensi published many more books, including a sequel to *Jagua Nana* called *Jagua Nana's Daughter* in 1993. He became a member of the Nigerian Academy of Letters in 2006 and died of undisclosed illness in 2007.

### Works in Literary Context

Ekwensi's novels are marked by their faithfulness to realism. Influenced by his time as a radio broadcaster, his works often portray the grit and grime of city life—full as it is of excitement as well as frustration—right along with political and social commentary. As such, Ekwensi's novels do for Africa—Lagos, in particular—what Dostoevsky did for St. Petersburg with his unflinching representation of that town's underbelly. Ultimately, though, Ekwensi will be remembered for popularizing the novel form in Africa and helping shape the art form to make it fit Africa's cultures and languages.

**City Life Captured** With the exception of *Burning Grass* and *Survive the Peace* (1976), all of Ekwensi's novels are set in the city of Lagos. He revels in the excitement of city life and loves to expose its many faces of modernity. Ekwensi writes about cultural centers, department stores, beaches, lagoons, political organizations and campaigns. He also writes about people in the city: criminals, prostitutes, band leaders, ministers of state, businessmen, civil servants, policemen, thugs, thieves, and many others. Authors such as J. M. Coetzee and Chinua Achebe have also written about the racial and political turmoil of the continent; Ekwensi, however, focuses his attention on the contemporary scene instead of Africa's pre-colonial past. Using a naturalistic narrative technique reminiscent of Émile Zola, Ekwensi captures both the restless excitement and the dissatisfaction of life in the city. Many of the incidents in his novels are taken from the everyday life around him because he believes that the function of a novelist is to reflect the social scene as faithfully as possible.

Ekwensi's novels trace the history of Nigeria in chronological sequence. *People of the City* is set in the last days

of the colonial era. Next is *Jagua Nana*, which covers the period of the election campaigns that ushered in the first independent government. *Beautiful Feathers* (1963) reflects the first optimistic years of independence with its concern for Pan-Africanism, the unity and cooperation of all African citizens. *Iska* (1966) exposes the tribal and factional divisions and animosities that finally erupted in the Nigerian civil war. Last is *Survive the Peace*, which begins at the end of the war and deals with the immediate problems of security and rehabilitation.

**Contribution to African Literature** Ekwensi's greatest contribution to Nigerian literature is undoubtedly his success as a social realist and a commentator on current events. *Jagua Nana* was one of the first novels to expose the corruption within the Nigerian political system, while *Iska* forecasted a civil war in Nigeria. *Survive the Peace*, a postwar novel, drew timely attention to refugee problems, the tragic fate of scattered families, and the fragility of peace. *Divided We Stand* was one of the first fictional documentaries on the war and its aftermath, and *For a Roll of Parchment* was one of the earliest exposés of the indignities suffered by African students in England. Ekwensi's choice of topical subjects only added to his unrivaled popularity.

### Works in Critical Context

Ekwensi's value in paving the way for other African novelists is undisputable. The quality of his writing, however, has been the source of much debate from the beginning of his career. *People of the City*, which established Ekwensi's basic format for his novels, has been criticized for its careless plotting and its disregard for the humanity of some of its characters, who are often unceremoniously and unnecessarily killed. Because Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* frankly depicts the sexual appetite of its leading character, it has drawn the anger of many critics and moralists since its publication.

**People of the City** Ekwensi knows Lagos, the setting of *People of the City*, very well. He also is aware of the idiosyncrasies of his characters, who are symptomatic of the city's moral depravity. The novel's strength is in its lifelike description of urban realities in Africa. Ekwensi ponders why things happen the way they do and why no one seems to care—or care enough. He attempts to confront society with its evils. The picture is one of squalor, bribery, corruption, and mercenary values presented by a person who has inside knowledge of the situation. In the end, it is the city that emerges as the villain: “The city eats many an innocent life every year.”

Ekwensi's didacticism and sense of retribution are evident throughout *People of the City*. Often he oversteps his role of mirroring society to that of judging it. Ekwensi is both the plaintiff and jury, and he sometimes resolves conflicts in the novel by simply killing off characters for whom he has no more use. These methods lead to melodramatic, unconvincing contrivances. Unresolved issues

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Because race and politics in Africa are oftentimes difficult to separate from one another, the political and social situation in Africa has been scrutinized not only by political analysts and ethnographers around the world, but also by writers and artists. Here are a few works that explore such conflict:

*Heart of Darkness* (1902), a novel by Joseph Conrad.

Describing the colonization of the Congo in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Conrad's work focuses on the oppression of the natives by a Belgian trading company intent on extracting and selling the resources of the Congo.

*Disgrace* (1999), a novel by J. M. Coetzee. This novel takes place just after an effort at racial subjugation in South Africa had ended; in order to survive in a country where black and white people are now considered equal, the white protagonist must unlearn the sexual and racial superiority he has formerly known.

*Catch a Fire* (2006), a film directed by Philip Noyce. Based on a true story, Patrick Chamusso, a black South African living under a racist government, turns to terrorism when he is falsely convicted of a crime.

at the conclusion of each subplot make the novel read like day-to-day records of events that are sometimes interconnected but, more often than not, these loose ends seem haphazardly thrown together. Nonetheless, *People of the City*, as the first modern West African novel in English, remains of major importance. It is the picture of Lagos in all its squalor—the infectious corruption, the grab-and-keep mania—that confirms its lasting value as a work of fiction.

**Jagua Nana** Ekwensi's second major urban novel, *Jagua Nana*, is remarkable in many ways and has drawn conflicting responses from critics. To many, it is a masterpiece and may well be his most lasting contribution to the art of the African novel. Certainly it is his most popular novel. To some, however, all the praise the novel has attracted is misplaced and misdirected because its value as a work of art is questionable. Published a year after Nigerian independence, some church organizations and women's unions attacked the novel and demanded that it be banned from circulation among the young. Even the Nigerian parliament was involved in the controversy. Before finally rejecting the idea, parliament debated several times a proposed filming of the novel in Nigeria by an Italian company. At the center of the whole controversy was Jagua, the heroine of the novel, whose uninhibited sexual life was said to have turned the novel into a mere exercise in pornography. Admirers of the novel, however,

have described Jagua as Ekwensi's most fully realized character and one of the most memorable heroines in fiction anywhere.

## Responses to Literature

1. *Jagua Nana* was quite the scandal when it was published in 1961 because of its provocative sexual material. Locate summaries of the novel that give you an idea of Jagua's lifestyle. Do you think the novel would be considered so scandalous if it had been released in the twenty-first century instead? Why or why not?
2. Read *People of the City* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Ekwensi's novel focuses on the city, while Achebe's text is decidedly rural. In a short essay, compare the impressions you get about Africa based on these different representations.
3. Some critics have suggested that Ekwensi's sense of humor is "Rabelaisian." Research this word. To what extent and in what ways do you think the term applies to Ekwensi's sense of humor, if at all?
4. J. M. Coetzee is a white South African, while Ekwensi is a Nigerian. Both are African novelists, though. Compare their representations of Africa. Based on your readings of these novelists, how do you think race—and racism, for that matter—plays into their portrayals of Africa?

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## Mircea Eliade

BORN: 1907, Bucharest, Romania

DIED: 1986, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.

NATIONALITY: Romanian

GENRE: Fiction, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Soliloquies* (1932)

*The Hooligans* (1955)

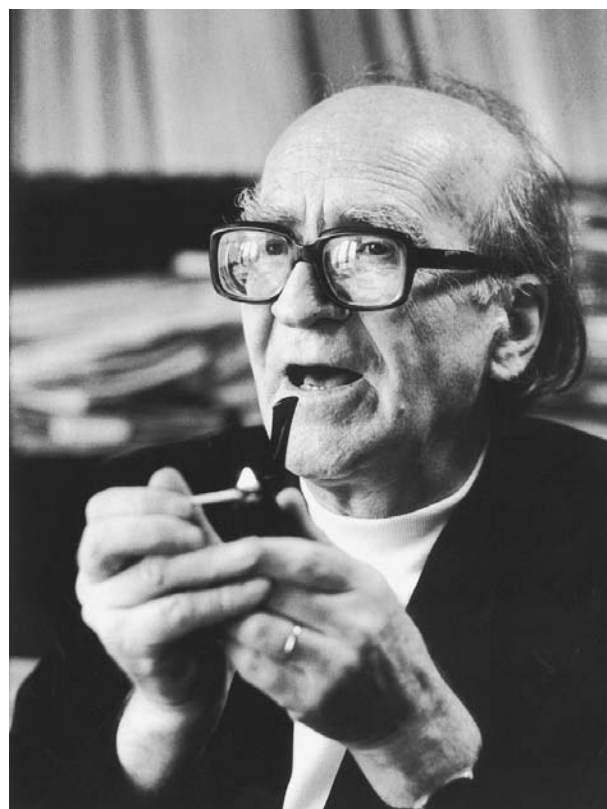
*The Sacred and the Profane* (1959)

*Shamanism* (1964)

*A History of Religious Ideas* (1976–1983)

## Overview

Mircea Eliade is best known in the West for his scholarly works and studies in comparative religion, written in French and English. Unfortunately, his literary works, written in Romanian, equally masterful but less frequently translated, are less known. Thus, as a writer of fiction, his work continues to belong only to Romanian literature: In his native land, Romania, where he is better known for his fantastic and realistic fiction, he ranks among the nation's most significant writers.



Mircea Eliade Michael Mauney / Time & Life Pictures / Getty Images

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***A Budding Intellect*** Mircea Eliade was born in Bucharest, Romania, to Gheorghe, an army officer and a native of Moldavia, and Ioana, a native of the western region of Oltenia. Because of his father's military postings, the Eliades moved twice between Tecuci and Bucharest, finally settling in the capital city soon after the outbreak of World War I in August 1914. They moved into a house whose attic was to play an almost mythical role in the writer's life. Around the time Eliade was admitted to the prestigious Spiru-Haret high school in 1917, he began reading novels and detective stories while simultaneously developing a passionate interest in the natural sciences, chemistry, zoology, and entomology.

***First Publications*** In the spring of 1921 his first article, "The Enemy of the Silkworm," was published in *Journal of Popular Sciences*. It was followed by a scientific story called "How I Discovered the Philosopher's Stone," which was awarded the first prize in a competition sponsored by the same journal. Encouraged, Eliade wanted to work in the field of science while also feeling a strong vocation for imaginative literature.

***Autobiographical Works*** In 1923 Eliade began writing an important autobiographical piece, "The Novel of the Nearsighted Adolescent," partly published in various periodicals between December 1926 and December 1927. The book aimed at being more than an autobiographical novel; it was also intended as a symbolic narrative about a teenager's life. Eliade also began keeping a journal, a habit he preserved until his death. Several years later, Eliade used the same technique of the autobiographical journal-novel inspired by the ideal of authenticity in his unpublished novel "Gaudeamus," which was conceived as a sequel to "The Novel of the Nearsighted Adolescent."

***Spokesman for a Generation*** By 1928 Eliade had earned the reputation of an astute essayist. He wrote regularly for the influential Bucharest-based *Cuvântul*, edited by his professor Nae Ionescu, one of the most important intellectuals in Romania during the interwar period. Eliade became interested in articulating problems related to his own generation. He addressed significant issues in an essay series, "Spiritual Itinerary, I-XII," published in *Cuvântul* in the fall of 1927.

***Studies Abroad: Italy and India*** In the spring of 1928 Eliade traveled to Italy, where he did research for his thesis, "Contributions to Renaissance Philosophy". As a result of his work, he successfully defended his thesis and graduated *magna cum laude* from the University of Bucharest in the fall of the same year. In August 1928 Eliade received a letter from Maharaja Nandy informing him that he was awarded a five-year grant to study Indian

philosophy with Dasgupta in Calcutta. There he spent three years studying Sanskrit, familiarizing himself with Indian philosophy, falling in love, and writing articles and novels for his Romanian readers.

***Prolific Years*** In the fall of 1932 Eliade and his friends founded in Bucharest the Criterion Association for Arts, Literature, and Philosophy, a cultural organization that held a series of public lectures and sponsored various other cultural events. In 1935, the year in which he became a member of the Society of Romanian writers, Eliade offered his readers three new books: *Asiatic Alchemy*, his first published scientific book; *Work in Progress*, a companion to *India*; and *The Hooligans*, a sequel to *The Return from Paradise*. Eliade never matched this astonishing pace of publication in subsequent years, while he devoted most of his time to consolidating his reputation as an academic. The book that contains the seeds of all Eliade's later interpretations of the symbolism at the center of the world, *Babylonian Cosmology and Alchemy*, appeared in the fall of 1937.

***Threatened Freedom*** A royal dictatorship was imposed on Romania in the spring of 1938. Corneliu Codreanu, the head of the right-wing Iron Guard movement, was arrested. People suspected of sympathizing with the Iron Guard were put under close supervision. Eliade, who had written a few right-wing articles, was also suspect. After escaping a night-time search of his home, he was arrested a few weeks later and charged with having suspect foreign contacts. Refusing to sign a declaration of dissociation from the Iron Guard (which he never belonged to), he was sent to a detention camp at Miercurea-Ciuc, where he joined Nae Ionescu. Eliade remained there only a few weeks. Suspected of having tuberculosis, he was transferred to a sanatorium further south and released three weeks later.

***Success in the 1950s*** For Eliade the 1950s were a successful decade in which he achieved long-deserved international recognition as a leading historian of religions. He was invited by Olga Froebe-Kapteyn to lecture at the multidisciplinary Eranos Conferences in Ascona, Italy. He also became a prominent member of a circle dominated by the psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung. In 1951 a research grant from the Bollingen Foundation relieved him of the poverty he had been living since his 1945 arrival in Paris. Two of his most important scientific books, *Shamanism. Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1951) and *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (1954) were published.

***Renewed Popularity, Retirement, and Declining Health*** In October of 1956, Eliade emigrated to the Chicago where he began a highly influential professorship. During the 1970s Eliade pursued his scholarship with renewed stamina and enthusiasm. Most of the books he published during this decade were academic, culminating with the first two volumes of his monumental

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Eliade's famous contemporaries include:

**Corneliu Codreanu** (1899–1938): Romanian leader of the Iron Guard, a violent anti-Semitic organization that was active during the interwar period.

**Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong** (1901–1971): The American jazz trumpeter who was an innovative and therefore primary influence in the advancement of jazz music.

**Walt Disney** (1901–1966): The American producer, screenwriter, animator, and entrepreneur who was one of the world's foremost entertainment artists, producing movies, amusement parks, and subsequent iconography.

**Ernest Hemingway** (1899–1961): The famous expatriate writer whose name is synonymous with the Great American Novel.

**Frida Kahlo** (1907–1954): The Mexican painter who became an influential figure with her representation of indigenous culture rendered in her distinctive style.

three-volume *A History of Religious Ideas* (1976–1983). Despite his declining health, Eliade's last years were dedicated as usual to travel, scholarship, and literature. He also continued to receive visits from admirers, friends, and Romanian exiles. In Romania the interest in Eliade was revived by the publication of *At the Court of Dionysus* (1977), which offered a good selection of Eliade's best fiction. In 1982 he started working on the second volume of his *Autobiography*, and in 1983 he retired from the University of Chicago.

Hailed as one of the founders of the history of religions in the United States, he completed the third volume of his *A History of Religious Ideas*, supervised the editing of the monumental sixteen-volume *Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987) and worked as a guide to world religions published in collaboration with his protégé Ioan P. Culianu at Chicago. In 1985 the trustees of the University of Chicago established a new chair in Eliade's honor. He died only a few months later, on April 22, 1986.

### Works in Literary Context

**Influences** Eliade's lifelong personal habits as a scholar and writer were influenced early and with great force: Jules Payot's *The Education of the Will* (1894), which Eliade read as a teen, started him on a rigorous process of self-discipline. To learn English he read James George Frazer. He discovered alchemy and the history of religions. He read Edouard Schuré, Lautréamont, Léon Bloy, Voltaire, and B. P. Hasdeu, and was fascinated by

the breadth of their knowledge. He also developed a special inclination for Honoré de Balzac. The teenage Eliade's greatest discovery, however, was Giovanni Papini's autobiography, *The Failure* (1912)—this book reinforced Eliade's drive toward encyclopedism as well as his will to self-perfection.

### *Profound Themes at Interplay in Dual Genres*

Eliade's five-year study of Indian philosophy with guru Dasgupta in Calcutta from 1928 to 1933 taught him great lessons and further reinforced his life-long themes of study. Most significantly, he discovered the sacred in objects or cosmic rhythms that are common to all traditional rural societies. This last lesson became a recurrent theme in Eliade's approach to the history of religions. As he did elsewhere in his fiction and nonfiction, Eliade further developed this theme in works such as *The Snake* (1937), a fantastic novel with common characters who become involved in a series of strange happenings. By using symbols such as the snake, the moon, the forest, and the water, Eliade described the way in which the fantastic permeates everyday life without disrupting it. He reiterated the main idea of the unrecognizability of miracles. This idea, along with the theme of the sacred camouflaged in the profane, is the key to all Eliade's major writings.

In 2006 the University of Chicago held a conference to evaluate the academic, political, and social contributions made by Eliade and another prominent religious scholar, Joachim Wach. In addition to recognition in the United States, sections of Europe's far right and German representatives of *Neue Rechte* credited Eliade with inspiring them in their respective endeavors.

### Works in Critical Context

As an encyclopedist writing in both fiction and nonfiction genres, Eliade developed a full-fledged methodology of the sacred that revealed his originality as an historian of religions and established him as a revered scholar. As renowned Canadian critic Northrop Frye once noted, the most impressive thing about Eliade's works was not the breadth of his erudition, but the unity and the consistency with which he brought together yoga, literature, primitive religions, and alchemy to form a pattern.

**A Mixed Affair** Reviewers were mixed in their opinions of the exoticism and the mythology of voluptuousness of *Maitreyi* (1935). The love story became a widely acclaimed novel and was hailed as a "revolution" in Romanian literary history. It was awarded the national prize for 1933 and was one of Eliade's most successful works, gaining him recognition as a major literary writer in Romania. A contributor to the *Times Literary Supplement* saw the tale as a "metaphor for the narrator's awakening consciousness of a new and radically different culture" and compared Eliade's "intensely poetic prose style, by turns declamatory and confessional" to Marguerite Duras and Elizabeth Smart. Isabel Colegate,



writing for the *New York Times Book Review*, reviewed both accounts and cited Eliade's version as "intensely felt and economically written." Fleming declared *Bengal Nights* to be "a romance not just with an Indian but with India herself." Indeed, several critics noted Eliade's feminization of India in this novel. Tilottama Minu Tharoor, writing for *Washington Post Book World*, noted Eliade's depiction of Alain as an engineer who "unabashedly revels in his assumptions of racial superiority and the power he exercises over the Indian landscape." Tharoor continued, "Whenever there is something about [Maitreyi] that eludes his immediate understanding, Alain refers to her as 'primitive.'" Fleming commented on the discrepancies and similarities between Eliade and Devi's versions: "Eliade's offense was not novelistic embellishment but rather its reverse: Had *Bengal Nights* not retained so many truths, it would have been far less damaging."

## Responses to Literature

1. The Spiritual Itinerary essays Eliade wrote empowered his generation. Write your own Spiritual Itinerary—for your generation. What will you include to empower, encourage, or inspire your peers? What is important to your generation?
2. There are several Web sites with trivia quizzes for celebrities and famous people. At Celebrina.com, however, there is only a blank form for Eliade (to date). Visit [www.celebrina.com/mircea-eliade.html](http://www.celebrina.com/mircea-eliade.html) and fill in the blanks, based on what you know about Eliade.
3. If the page is finally complete, go to the next prompt here: Work alone to come up with your own trivia quiz on the author. When you finish, trade quizzes with a partner. What do your two trivia quizzes have in common? What did you leave out? What had you included that your partner left out? What does this tell you about what is important to your partner and to you?
4. Eliade was greatly affected by the political extremism in Romania. To put his life and work into further context, do a Web search on the political movements in the country during the 1930s and following decades. If you work in a group, each person could consider one element—censorship, the problems with King Carol II, the Iron Guard movement—and meet again to inform each other, giving you a more complete picture.

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## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also explored religion, alchemy, and mysticism:

*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), a nonfiction book by Joseph Campbell. In this influential work, the author investigates heroes and heroism, myths and mythology.

*A History of God* (2004), a nonfiction book by Karen Armstrong. In this comprehensive study, the author thoroughly explores three monotheisms: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

*Man and His Symbols* (1961), a nonfiction book by Carl Jung and colleagues. In this collection, Jung and four esteemed scholars discuss mythology, ritual, and symbol in art and culture.

*The Tempest* (1610–1611), a play by William Shakespeare. In one of his last plays, Shakespeare features the magician Prospero and explores alchemy on many levels.

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## George Eliot

BORN: 1819, Warwickshire, England

DIED: 1880, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

*Adam Bede* (1859)

*The Mill on the Floss* (1860)

*Silas Marner* (1861)

*Middlemarch* (1871–1872)

### Overview

George Eliot's work has been praised for its realistic approach to character and skillful plot development. Staged against the backdrop of rural England, Eliot's novels explore moral and philosophical issues associated with the growing agnosticism and spiritual despair of nineteenth-century English society. *Middlemarch* is considered unsurpassed among novels of the period in intellectual depth, and it remains the work on which Eliot's reputation most firmly rests.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

*Deep Relationships with Father and Brother* Eliot, born Mary Ann Evans, was the youngest child of



George Eliot Eliot, George, drawing. The Library of Congress

Robert Evans, agent for the estate of Sir Francis Newdigate, and Christiana Pearson Evans, his second wife. She grew up in the red-brick-and-ivy Griff House, overlooking the fields and canals of Warwickshire. She began school at five years old, and, like her brothers and sisters (two of the four half-siblings from her father's first marriage), she was a boarding student at an Evangelical school. Her fiction suggests that the most important relationships of her childhood were with her full brother Isaac, prototype of the difficult-to-please Tom Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), and her father, often described as a model for *Adam Bede* and Caleb Garth as well as for Mr. Tulliver, who is always willing to take his daughter's part in her emotional struggles.

By the time she was twenty-one, Evans's mother had died and her brothers and sisters were married and scattered. She left Griff and moved with her father into a house on the Foleshill Road in Coventry. Partly because of her friendship with Charles Bray, who had bought the paper in June 1846, Evans wrote some short reviews and essays for the *Herald* the following winter, pieces that would become her first publications.

*A Nurse First and a Journalist Second* Evans wrote little prose during the next few years, which she spent keeping house and nursing her father as he endured his last illness. Until she began writing for the *Westminster Review* in 1851, apparently her only publication was a rave review of James Anthony Froude's *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849). The review was so enthusiastic that it prompted mutual friends to set up a romantic—albeit fruitless—matchmaking scheme. The plan backfired when Froude failed to show up at the rendezvous point, and announced his engagement to another in his note of regret.

Having spent the winter after her father's death in 1850 alone in Geneva, Evans returned to England alone. She soon after made the move to leave behind the provinces permanently, except as settings for her fiction. Recruited by John Chapman to edit his newly acquired pet project, the *Westminster Review*, she moved into his publishing, bookselling, and lodging establishment at 142 Strand and became a member of London's lively literary and intellectual set. Among her new acquaintances was George Henry Lewes, who contributed articles on philosophical, scientific, and literary topics to the *Westminster Review* and other London periodicals. Despite Lewes's thoroughly failed—but still legal—marriage to Agnes Jervis, Lewes and Evans began in 1853 a mutually supportive intellectual, romantic, and emotional partnership that endured until his death in 1878.

*A Life in Motion* In eloping first to Germany in 1854, Evans and Lewes set a lifelong pattern by which they interspersed periods of hard work in London with travel that was part vacation, part field trip. On the initial trip to Weimar and Berlin, Lewes was completing a biography of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe while Evans

gathered material and background for articles. Her need to supplement the small income from her father's legacy resulted in the following two years of intense journalistic productivity. During this time, she wrote dozens of reviews, most of them for the *Westminster Review* and the *Leader*. In Germany, this was a period of intense upheaval. The Prussia-led unification of Germany into a modern nation state would not occur until France's final defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, in 1871. And the French revolution of 1848 had sparked a series of revolutions in the German states, whose aftermath was far from resolved when Evans and Lewes first traveled there. Evans's German travel, together with the extensive religious reading of the Evangelical days of her youth, equipped her to write especially rapidly and well on books pertaining both to German history and culture and to religion.

***Forsaking the Lying Truth for the True Lie***  
Evans gave up journalism almost completely when she began writing fiction in the fall of 1856, and soon, for fear of finding negative comments on her own work, she stopped even reading book reviews. The excellent income from the novels freed her from financial need, and, unlike her journalism, her fiction could conveniently be written away from London. During the next twenty years, despite their permanent residence at The Priory near Regent's Park beginning in 1863, she and Lewes often fled the fog, the noise, and the sooty air of London. Eliot (who had assumed her pseudonym in 1857) wrote much of her fiction while traveling on the Continent or on holiday at the seaside. She chose a male pen name, although female authors published freely during that time, to distinguish herself from what American author Nathaniel Hawthorne referred to as that "damned mob of scribbling women," the female authors of popular romances. At home she and Lewes were occupied with settling his three growing sons in suitable professions, taking care of each other's feeble health, and maintaining the literary social life that they developed as the fame of the novels increased. By the late 1870s Eliot's success as a novelist had brought her not only wealth and fame but also the simple social acceptance denied her since she and Lewes had begun living together openly. At the Priory they entertained friends and fans on Sunday afternoons, and they began a series of regular visits to the universities at Oxford and Cambridge.

After Lewes died in 1878, Eliot struggled with her grief for more than a year, then astonished her friends and her public by marrying John Walter Cross, a banker twenty years younger than she. They honeymooned on the continent and leased a new house in London, but only seven months after her wedding Eliot died suddenly—in December of 1880. The beloved novelist was buried in Highgate Cemetery on the north edge of London, a city she seldom represented in her novels but evoked consistently in her nonfiction prose.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Eliot's famous contemporaries include:

**Harriet Beecher Stowe** (1811–1896): American abolitionist most famous for her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and a writer whom Eliot admired.

**Charles Dickens** (1812–1870): Famous British writer whose novels are often compared to Eliot's, perhaps due to their scope and intricate plots.

**George Henry Lewes** (1817–1878): English philosopher, critic, and Eliot's longtime partner.

**Herbert Spencer** (1820–1903): English philosopher who coined the term "survival of the fittest" after reading Charles Darwin's work on the evolution of species.

**Abraham Lincoln** (1809–1865): Lincoln, the sixteenth president of the United States, was perhaps the most powerful antislavery advocate of all time, pushing for and signing into law the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which abolished slavery.

## Works in Literary Context

***Science as Metaphor for Life*** The use of scientific metaphor is characteristic of George Eliot's work, and bespeaks a dominant tendency of her period. Eliot was associated with Herbert Spencer, George Henry Lewes, and other "scientific philosophers," and their influence upon her was great. Counterbalancing this, however, was a conservative tendency arising from her early acquaintance with rural life in the Midlands and Evangelical background. In her short story "Amos Barton," that conflict is apparent in the alternating condescension and tenderness of her attitude toward her subject. But in the *Scenes of Clerical Life*, for example, her originality and insight are still obscured by conventional forms of expression, corresponding to conventional modes of feeling and thought. In general, Eliot's work may be described as psychological realism, a genre dependent on the application of scientific ways of seeing to the understanding of human relations, and one that included such greats as Jane Austen and, later, Henry James. Eliot's progress as an artist mirrored, then, the intellectual and social movement of her period toward scientific rationality—with all of its advantages and flaws.

***Selflessness, Morality, and the Novel*** One common theme found in many of Eliot's works is selflessness. Silas Marner, the main character in her novel of the same name, experiences only misfortune when he works for his own wealth and happiness. However, when he takes in a young child whose opium-addicted mother has died, his life—and his place as a member of the community—is

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Eliot's *Middlemarch* is concerned not only with characters but with politics, as the events primarily center around the Reform Act of 1832. Her other novels also comment on political events and debates that were significant to Victorian England. Here are some other works that deal with political issues during tense times.

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), a novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe. This antislavery, pre-Civil War novel led Abraham Lincoln to refer to Stowe as "the little lady who made this big war."

*A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), a novel by Charles Dickens. Set around the time of the French Revolution, this novel reaches its climax during the storming of the Bastille prison.

*Lumumba* (2000), a film directed by Raoul Peck. This movie depicts the movement in the Democratic Republic of Congo for independence from Belgium in 1960.

*Hotel Rwanda* (2004), a film directed by Terry George. The true tale of a hotel manager who helped save the lives of over one thousand Tutsi refugees during the genocidal rampage of Hutu extremists in 1994 is captured in this film, which earned Don Cheadle an Academy Award nomination for his portrayal of the main character.

transformed. In *Daniel Deronda*, the title character lives his life as selflessly as possible, which serves as an example to the self-involved Gwendolen Harleth, who shows signs of maturity by the end of the novel. In these and other works, Eliot is still negotiating the historical legacy of the novel as an art form. Particularly in England, the development of the novel was regarded with skepticism by many, and was often called on to justify its existence by providing solid moral instruction for readers. Insofar as her work does offer some moral instruction—though not without a degree of skepticism—Eliot follows in the footsteps of such British authors as Samuel Richardson, whose eighteenth-century bestseller *Pamela* (1740) has delighted and infuriated critics and moralists alike for centuries.

### Works in Critical Context

While Eliot was regarded as the leading English novelist during the last years of her life, it was common at that time to differentiate between her early and late work and to prefer the former. Reviewers almost unanimously agreed that Eliot's later novels were overly philosophic and didactic, lacking the spontaneity and charm of her early autobiographical works. Consequently, the esteem

in which she was held was already in decline at the time of her death in 1885, and was further diminished by the late-Victorian revolt against "the-novel-with-a-purpose" or "novel of conduct." It was not until the 1940s that her novels, particularly the later ones, returned to favor, generating a resurgence of interest in her work and a body of criticism that rivals dedicated to her fellow Victorian, Charles Dickens. The variety and quantity of current critical response is perhaps the best measure of Eliot's complex genius. She continues to inspire analysis for her psychological insight, broad vision, and mastery of a realistic style.

***Adam Bede*** "There can be no mistake about *Adam Bede*," wrote one reviewer for the *London Times*. "It is a first-rate novel, and its author takes rank at once among the masters of the art." The novel was first published in three volumes in February of 1859. A year later it had gone through four editions with four printings of the last edition; had been translated into French, German, Dutch, and Hungarian; had spawned a sequel; and had brought forward a Warwickshire eccentric named Joseph Liggins who claimed to be the real George Eliot (since the true author had concealed herself behind a pseudonym). *Adam Bede* sold sixteen thousand copies in a year and earned Eliot a great deal of money. "In its influence," the probably partial Lewes wrote to his son Charles, "and in obtaining the suffrages of the highest and wisest as well as of the ordinary novel reader, nothing equals *Adam Bede*."

***The Mill on the Floss*** Eliot's next novel, *The Mill on the Floss*, was published in 1860, and was subjected to scathing criticism: The main character Maggie is not of "the smallest importance to anybody in the world" but herself, said philosopher and critic John Ruskin. Ruskin's reaction was symptomatic of that of most critics of the novel: *The Mill on the Floss* affected them where they were weakest. They felt that Maggie's free will was unfairly overcome in a moment of crisis. Their simple categories of right and wrong were undermined by what later critics have described as a "complex web of heredity, physiology, and environment." Consequently, as David Carroll remarks, "The Victorian reader's sympathies have been turned against his moral judgment and he feels aggrieved."

***Middlemarch*** *Middlemarch*, says A. S. Byatt, "is a novel, above all, about intelligence and its triumphs, failures, distractions, fallings-short, compromises and doggedness." The greatness of *Middlemarch* was immediately acknowledged; the novel was a classic in its own time. In *The Mill on the Floss* Eliot had written a tragedy; in *Middlemarch* she wrote an epic. And *Middlemarch* could be accorded too much praise, claims Geoffrey Tollotson, only "by saying that it was easily the best of the half-dozen best novels in the world."

## Responses to Literature

1. Discuss the symbolism of the coming of the new year in *Silas Marner*.
2. Describe some common characteristics of Eliot's female characters. What are their primary concerns and goals? How do they reflect the society of nineteenth-century England?
3. Research the Reform Act of 1832 and explain why Eliot thought it important enough to set her novel *Middlemarch* during the time prior to the passing of the act.
4. *Middlemarch* is widely considered Eliot's best work. In your opinion, is this because of the power of her story and characters, or because she was the first to use certain techniques that have become commonplace in modern novels? Do you think certain works should be read and remembered because they represent landmarks in the development of literature, regardless of whether the writings themselves are viewed as timeless works of art? Why or why not?
5. Why did the Victorians revolt against the "novel-with-a-purpose"? Do you think Eliot is partly to blame for this new trend? Why or why not?

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## T. S. Eliot

BORN: 1888, St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A.

DIED: 1965, London, England

NATIONALITY: American, British

GENRE: Poetry, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Prufrock, and Other Observations* (1917)

*The Waste Land* (1922)

*Journey of the Magi* (1927)

*Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (1939)

*Four Quartets* (1943)

### Overview

T. S. Eliot, the 1948 winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, is one of the giants of modern literature, highly distinguished as a poet, literary critic, dramatist, and editor/publisher. Eliot articulated distinctly modern themes in forms that were a marked departure from those of nineteenth-century poetry. Among his best-known works were "Gerontion" (1920), and within a couple of years, one of the most famous and influential poems of the century, *The Waste Land* (1922).



T. S. Eliot Eliot, T. S., London, England, 1956, photograph. AP Images.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Midwestern Born, but New England Bred** Thomas Stearns Eliot was born on September 26, 1888, in St. Louis, Missouri. He was the second son and seventh child of Charlotte Champe Stearns and Henry Ware Eliot, members of a distinguished Massachusetts family recently transplanted to Missouri and fiercely loyal to their New England roots. Eliot's family tree includes settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, prominent clergymen and educators, a president of Harvard University (Charles William Eliot), and three presidents of the United States (John Adams, John Quincy Adams, and Rutherford B. Hayes). His father was the president of a local company in St. Louis, and his mother was educated at the city's Smith Academy. He completed his preparations for college by attending the Massachusetts-based Milton Academy.

**Early Poems Published While at Harvard** Entering Harvard in 1906, Eliot studied with some of the most distinguished philosophers of the century, including George Santayana, Josiah Royce, and Bertrand Russell. He focused on the religion of India and idealist philosophy (especially Immanuel Kant), with further work in ethics and psychology. His studies, which included two years of Sanskrit and Indian philosophy, influenced his perspective and provided a more comprehensive context for his understanding of culture. Later, these Eastern materials entered his poetry. Eliot also joined the staff of the *Harvard Advocate*, the university's literary magazine, where several of his earliest poems were first published.

**A Move to England** Between the poems of 1910–1911 and *The Waste Land* (1922), Eliot lived through several experiences that are crucial in understanding his development as a poet—he moved to England and eventually became naturalized as a British subject, married Vivienne Haighwood, and became a member of the Anglican Church. While in London, Eliot called on the poet Ezra Pound, and Pound immediately adopted him as a cause, promoting his poetry and introducing him to William Butler Yeats and other artists. In 1915, at a time when Eliot was close to giving up on poetry, Pound arranged for the publication of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” in *Poetry* magazine. Pound continued to play a central role in Eliot's life and work through the early 1920s. He influenced the form and content of Eliot's next group of poems, the quatrains in *Poems* (1919), and more famously, he changed the shape of *The Waste Land* by urging Eliot to cut several long passages.

In addition to Pound's influence, Eliot's poetry was also affected by his marriage to Vivienne Haighwood. Their relationship was troubled by her neurotic disorders, and the element of despair is evident in his poetry from

1915 through the 1920s. To support himself and his chronically ill wife, Eliot took several jobs to help cover medical expenses. Working from 1916 to 1920 under great pressure (a fifteen-hour workday was common for him), he wrote essays, published in 1920 as *The Sacred Wood*, that reshaped literary history.

**Illness Sparks Creativity** The years of anxiety in Eliot's personal life took its toll, and in 1921, on the verge of a nervous breakdown, he sought treatment in a sanatorium in Switzerland. (A sanatorium is a medical facility for long-term care or for those recovering from illness.) In this protected environment, he completed “The Waste Land.” The poem was extensively edited by Pound, at Eliot's request, and in 1922, *The Waste Land* was published in the first issue of the *Criterion*, a literary review edited by Eliot.

*The Waste Land*, considered a masterwork of high modernism, was a direct response to the despair and destruction wreaked in all areas of European society by World War I. The Great War, as it is also called, started as a skirmish between Austria-Hungary and Serbia after Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was assassinated in Serbia by a member of a Bosnian nationalist group. Because of long-standing tensions and entangling alliances, nearly the whole of Europe became involved in the war, including Great Britain, and later the United States. Of the estimated 30 million military casualties, nearly 2.5 million were British soldiers. Almost a million were killed.

**Success and Later Years** In 1927, Eliot was baptized in the Anglican Church and became naturalized as a British subject. As Europe again inched toward war amidst a worldwide economic downturn known as the Great Depression in the 1930s, Eliot's major poetic achievement was “Burnt Norton,” composed in 1935. It was the first of four comparable works that together are known as *Four Quartets*. They are usually considered his masterpiece, and Eliot himself thought *Four Quartets* his greatest achievement and “Little Gidding” his best poem.

Eliot lived through World War II, a conflict in which Great Britain came close to being overrun by Adolf Hitler-led Nazi Germany as the rest of Europe had been. While Britain remained free and survived to triumph over the Nazis by the war's end, Eliot experienced marked changes in his personal life in the post-war period beginning in 1947. His wife, Vivienne, died, after having spent several years in an institution. In 1948, Eliot received the Nobel Prize for Literature, augmenting his stature as a celebrated literary figure. Then in 1957, he married Valerie Fletcher. T. S. Eliot's last years, though happy, were darkened by illness. He died of emphysema in London on January 4, 1965.

## Works in Literary Context

Eliot's first volume of poetry, *Prufrock, and Other Observations*, established him as an important new voice in American and English poetry. Its poems encapsulate the



distinctive techniques Eliot uses throughout his career. Many critics noticed the influence of French symbolists in the poems, notably Jules Laforgue and Charles Baudelaire. These poets had impressed Eliot with their realistic portrayals of urban landscapes and their bold use of irony and symbolism. Eliot's earlier poems feature similar qualities. They are characterized by their sardonic tone, strong rhythms achieved by blending formal and informal language, and vivid, startling metaphors.

**Isolation** Eliot's early poems present a metaphorical view of the modern world as dry, desolate, barren, and spiritually empty. The isolation is social, religious, and (because Eliot is a poet) vocational. In "Portrait of a Lady," other people and perhaps God exist, but they are unreachable; in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," they exist only as aspects of the thinker's mind. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot reveals his position that modern society had lost its spirituality to secularism.

**Failure of Communication** Another theme commonly found in Eliot's poems is the failure of communication, of a positive relationship, between a man and a woman. It is found in the other early poems "Hysteria" and "La Figlia che Piange," and appears early in *The Waste Land* with the image of the "hyacinth girl." Over time, the failure of communication becomes related to other emerging themes, especially to religious meanings, for example, in the symbolic imagery of the "rose-garden," which appears in *Ash Wednesday*, *Four Quartets*, *The Family Reunion*, and *The Confidential Clerk*.

**Influence** As an eminent poet, critic, and playwright, Eliot has maintained an influence upon literature that some critics claim is unequaled by any other twentieth-century writer. His poetry and prose are frequently cited as having helped inaugurate the modern period in English and American letters. His influence could be felt on poetry until the end of the century and beyond.

## Works in Critical Context

Largely considered one of the greatest modern poets, Eliot has maintained an influence on literature that some critics claim is unequaled by any other twentieth-century writer. In the 1920s, Eliot's densely allusive style gained him an international reputation on the order of Albert Einstein's, but his fondness for European models and subjects prompted some of his compatriots to regard him as a turncoat to his country and to the artistic tradition of the new it had come to represent. Beginning in the 1950s, new experimental techniques in poetry, the revival of the Romantic belief in the primacy of the individual, and the emergence of personal or "confessional" poetry led to a decline in Eliot's authority and popularity. Most recent critics, however, while expressing occasional reservations about Eliot's personal ideology, agree that his profoundly innovative, erudite approach to poetry and criticism has had a permanent impact on literature.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Eliot's famous contemporaries include:

**Ezra Pound** (1885–1972): American modern poet who suggested that poets "make it new." Pound helped Eliot edit and publish his works.

**James Joyce** (1882–1941): Irish writer best known for the modernist novel *Ulysses*.

**Conrad Aiken** (1889–1973): American poet and close friend of Eliot at Harvard. Aiken edited Emily Dickinson's *Selected Poems* (1924), which helped establish her literary reputation posthumously.

**Bertrand Russell** (1872–1970): British philosopher and Nobel Prize winner who was known for being politically outspoken and anti-imperialistic. He was the coauthor of *Principia Mathematica*.

***The Waste Land*** Among the most innovative, influential, and controversial poems of the twentieth century, *The Waste Land* challenged conventional definitions of poetry upon its publication in 1922. The five sections of this book-length poem are composed of apparently random, disconnected images and scenes and are spoken by several different voices that blend together. The meaning of *The Waste Land* is a subject of much debate, but scholars generally agree that it presents a metaphorical portrait of the modern world as dry and desolate and of humanity as emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually empty. Acknowledging its complexity, Hugh Kenner contended that the poem's imposing structure invites imaginative readings: "*The Waste Land* is suffused with a functional obscurity ... embracing the fragmented present and reaching back to that 'vanished mind of which our mind is a continuum.'"

***Four Quartets*** Eliot told Donald Hall in 1959 that he considered *Four Quartets* to be his best work, "and," he added, "I'd like to feel that they get better as they go on. The second is better than the first, the third is better than the second, and the fourth is the best of all. At any rate, that's the way I flatter myself." Neville Braybrooke writes: "It is ... generally agreed ... that in his *Four Quartets* [Eliot] attempted ... to achieve a poetry so transparent that in concentrating on it attention would not fall so much on the words, but on what the words pointed to. And in his rigorous stripping away of the poetic, such a pure poetry is sustained."

## Responses to Literature

1. Read the poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." In groups, prepare answers to the following questions:



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In his later years, Eliot wrote more about spiritual issues than personal ones. He knew about many religions, such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism, and referred to them symbolically and literally in his texts, particularly in *Four Quartets*. Here are some other works that emphasize spiritual and religious concerns:

"The Second Coming" (1920), a poem by William Butler Yeats. In this famous poem, the speaker worries that the end of the world may be coming, and that instead of Jesus Christ, someone or something else might be in control.

*Siddhartha* (1922), a novel by Hermann Hesse. This book is a fictionalized version of the story of the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama.

*The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), a film directed by Martin Scorsese. Based on the novel by Nikos Kazantzakis, this film is an epic but controversial look at the last days of Jesus Christ on earth.

*The Life of Pi* (2001), a novel by Yann Martel. The book is the story of a shipwrecked Indian boy who contemplates the nature of God while stranded on a raft with a live tiger.

Why will the mermaids not sing to Prufrock at the end of the poem? Do you think Prufrock is actually talking to a real woman? Is this indeed a love song? Explain.

2. Write a short review describing which of the *Four Quartets* you think is best and why.
3. With a partner, find references to *Alice in Wonderland* and the Bible in *Four Quartets*. Discuss why Eliot would use these allusions.
4. With a partner, choose one of the sections from *The Waste Land* and prepare an oral reading for the class that emphasizes an aspect of the poem such as theme or subject matter.

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## Odysseus Elytis

BORN: 1911, Heraklion, Crete, Greece

DIED: 1996, Athens, Greece

NATIONALITY: Greek

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Orientations* (1939)

*The Axion Esti* (1959)

*Maria Nefeli* (1978)

*The Little Mariner* (1988)

*West of Sadness* (1995)

### Overview

An internationally acclaimed poet who is considered among the foremost Greek literary figures of the twentieth century, Odysseus Elytis celebrated the splendors of nature while affirming humanity's ability to embrace hope over despair. Combining his interest in surrealism with lyrical evocations of Greek landscape, history, and culture, Elytis created poems that exalt the virtues of sensuality, innocence, and imagination while striving to reconcile these attributes with life's tragic aspects. A recipient of the 1979 Nobel Prize in Literature, Elytis was cited by the Swedish Academy for writing "poetry which, against the background of Greek tradition, depicts with sensuous strength and intellectual clear-sightedness modern man's struggle for freedom and creativity."



Odysseas Elytis Elytis, *Odysseus*, photograph. AP Images.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***Childhood Summers by the Sea*** The youngest of six children, Elytis was born in Heraklion, Crete, to a wealthy industrialist and his wife. He attended primary and secondary schools in Athens before enrolling at the University of Athens School of Law. As a youth, Elytis spent his summer vacations on the Aegean Islands, absorbing the seaside atmosphere that deeply informs the imagery of his verse. Also essential to Elytis's poetic development was his attraction to surrealism, which he developed during the late 1920s through the works of French poet Paul Éluard.

***Artistic Awakening*** In 1935, after leaving law school, Elytis displayed several visual collages at the First International Surrealist Exhibition in Athens and began publishing poems in various Greek periodicals. His first collection of verse, *Orientations*, focuses on the beauty of the Aegean landscape. These poems also display Elytis's affinity for such surrealistic devices as the portrayal of supernatural occurrences, exploration of the unconscious, and personification of abstract ideas and natural phenomena. In his next volume, *Sun the First*, Elytis confirmed his predilection for examining nature's intrinsic relationship with human spirituality.

***Reflections of War in Poetry*** During World War II, Italy and Germany were allied. Italy's dictator, Benito Mussolini, grew anxious to emulate the territorial expan-

sion of Germany's leader Adolf Hitler, and resolved to seize Greece. During the Italian invasion of Greece in 1940 and 1941, Elytis served on the Albanian front as a second lieutenant in Greece's First Army Corps. The heroism he witnessed amid the tragedy and suffering of combat is reflected in his long poem *Heroic and Elegiac Song for the Lost Second Lieutenant of the Albanian Campaign*. Centering on the death of a young Greek soldier whose transfiguration and resurrection serves as an affirmation of justice and liberty, this work advances Elytis's concerns with the merging of physical and spiritual existence and pays tribute to those individuals who resist oppression and defend freedom.

***Immersion in Civic and Cultural Affairs*** Following the publication of *Heroic and Elegiac Song*, Elytis ceased producing poetry for more than a decade, immersing himself in civic and cultural affairs. From 1948 to 1953, during a period of civil war and subsequent civil unrest in Greece, Elytis lived in Paris, where he studied at the Sorbonne and wrote articles in French for *Verve* magazine. Several years after returning to Greece, Elytis published *The Axion Esti*, an intricately structured cycle alternating prose and verse. Indebted for much of its tone, language, symbolism, and structure to the liturgy of the Greek Orthodox Church, *The Axion Esti* incorporates elements of Christianity and images of Grecian landscapes and culture while augmenting Elytis's concern for the spirituality of the material world.

In the 1960s, translators abroad began to take notice of Elytis's poetry, and translations of his poems appeared in German, English, Italian, and French. During this period, Elytis traveled extensively. In 1961 he journeyed to the United States as a guest of the State Department; in 1962 he visited the Soviet Union; in 1965 he toured Bulgaria; in 1967, just before the military coup, he visited Egypt; and in 1969 he moved to Paris.

***1979 Nobel Prize in Literature*** In 1975 Elytis was offered an honorary doctorate from the Philosophical School of the University of Thessaloniki, and he was proclaimed an honorary citizen of Lesbos. In 1979 he was proclaimed an honorary citizen of Heracleion, Crete. In 1975 *Books Abroad* dedicated an entire issue to his poetry. The greatest surprise for the poet, however, came in October 1979, when the secretary of the Swedish Academy announced the awarding of the 1979 Nobel Prize in Literature to Elytis "for his poetry, which, against the background of Greek tradition, depicts with sensuous strength and intellectual clear-sightedness modern man's struggle for freedom and creativeness." Other candidates for the 1979 Nobel Prize in Literature included Graham Greene, Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, and Simone de Beauvoir. The announcement was received with tremendous enthusiasm in Greece.

***Post-Nobel Popularity*** Elytis lived and continued to create for seventeen years after receiving the Nobel Prize

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Elytis's famous contemporaries include:

**George Seferis** (1900–1971): Greek poet who became the first Greek to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1963.

**Mikis Theodorakis** (1925–): One of Greece's best-known composers, Theodorakis scored films such as *Zorba the Greek* (1969) and *Serpico* (1973), and also put Elytis's *The Axion Esti* to music.

**Panagiotis Kanellopoulos** (1902–1986): Greek author and politician who briefly served as prime minister of Greece twice, in 1945 and in 1967.

**André Breton** (1896–1966): French writer often credited as the main founder of the surrealist movement.

**Paul Éluard** (1895–1952): This French poet, partially influenced by the American author Walt Whitman, was associated with the founding of the surrealist movement.

in Literature. His post-Nobel popularity kept him busy. The few years that immediately followed the Nobel presentation were spent almost entirely on award receptions, presentations, and speeches around the globe. In 1980 he was presented with an honorary doctorate from the Sorbonne in France, and in 1981 he received an honorary doctorate from the University of London. He was also declared an honorary citizen of Larnaca and Paphos (Cyprus), and he was invited by the Spanish prime minister Adolfo Suárez González to visit Spain, where he was declared an honorary citizen of Toledo (in the fall of 1980). The Royal Society of Literature (United Kingdom) presented him with the Benson Medal in 1981, an award given as lifetime recognition in poetry, fiction, history, and belles lettres. Also in 1981, Rutgers University, in the United States, established the Elytis Chair of Modern Greek Studies in honor of the poet, and in March 1982 he was presented, by Mayor D. Beis of Athens, with the Gold Medal of Honor of the City of Athens. During the 1980s Elytis published three collections of poetry: *Tria Poiimata me simaia Eykairias* (1982, *Three Poems Under a Flag of Convenience*), *Ímerologio enos Atheatou Apriliou* (1984; translated as *Journal of an Unseen April*, 1998), and *O Mikros Nautilos* (1986; translated as *The Little Mariner*, 1999).

**West of Sadness** Elytis's final collection, *Dytika tis Lypís* (1995, translated *West of Sadness*) was written in the summer of 1995 in Porto Rafti, Greece, where the poet was vacationing with fellow poet Ioulita Iliopoulou, who had been his partner for about a decade (he had never married nor had children). The seven poems of the

collection are “more dense,” as Elytis wrote, “and for this reason more difficult, but closer to my ideal.” The title of the collection signals its mood: on one hand, the life of the eighty-three-year-old poet is moving westward toward its setting; but on the other hand, it also moves “west of sorrow,” that is, beyond where sorrow itself sets. The biographical events in the poet's life are insignificant: “what remains,” the collection concludes, “is poetry alone.”

Elytis died of a stroke in his apartment in Athens on March 18, 1996. A posthumous collection titled *Ek tou Plísion* (From Nearby) was put together by his heir, Iliopoulou, and was published in 1998.

### Works in Literary Context

Elytis's poetry is often read in the context of surrealism, the artistic movement known for its rejection of objective reality. Indeed, he is the translator of numerous surrealist texts into Greek and has written extensively on the subject, many of these essays collected in the volume *The Open Book*. Significantly, in 1991 an exhibition of Greek poetry and painting, including work by Elytis, was staged at the Georges Pompidou Centre Paris, titled “Surrealist Greeks.” This title is especially accurate in describing Elytis, because although Elytis's work does incorporate many of the elements of surrealism, it is equally important to remember where Elytis comes from, as he infuses his writing with the rich culture, heritage, landscapes, and literary traditions of his native Greece.

**“Greek Reality”** Although Elytis engages with contemporary surrealism in his poems, it would be misleading to exaggerate the extent of the poet's commitment to any movement. Even in the early verse, surrealism is adapted (to borrow Elytis's own term) as the poet confronts “Greek reality,” drawing upon the resources of a native poetic tradition. In fact Elytis has been outspoken in stressing his intimate poetic relationship to Greek literary figures as diverse as Andreas Kalvos (1946) and Alexandros Papadiamantis (1976). Moreover, echoes from Greek folk poetry, Byzantine hymns, and liturgical texts reverberate through his poetry. As Elytis remarked in his Nobel acceptance speech in 1979, the poet must simultaneously “recast the elements to the social and psychological requirements of [his] age.” Echoes from the German poets Friedrich Holderlin and Novalis interact with allusions to the national Greek poet Dionysios Solomos.

**Surrealism and the Free Association of Ideas** Elytis adapted only selected principles of surrealism to his Greek reality. Some other characteristics of surrealism, such as automatic writing, were considered unacceptable to Elytis. Free association of ideas, a concept he often made use of, allowed him to portray objects in their “reality” but also in their “surreality.” This is shown in various poems, as when a young girl is transformed into a fruit, a landscape becomes a human body, and the mood

of a morning takes on the form of a tree. “I have always been preoccupied with finding the analogies between nature and language in the realm of imagination, a realm to which the surrealists also gave much importance, and rightly so,” claimed Elytis. “Everything depends on imagination, that is, on the way a poet sees the same phenomenon as you do, yet *differently* from you.”

*Orientations*, published in 1936, was Elytis’s first volume of poetry. Filled with images of light and purity, the work earned for its author the title of the “sun-drinking poet.” Edmund Keeley, a frequent translator of Elytis’s work, observed that these “first poems offered a surrealism that had a distinctly personal tone and a specific local habitation. The tone was lyrical, humorous, fanciful, everything that is young.”

**Popularity Today Resists Classification** Odysseus Elytis’s popularity in Greece remains astounding. He became a national commodity after the Nobel Prize, as evident in a continuous inclusion of his name in cultural and national symbolism: More than a dozen streets in Greece and Cyprus are named after him; a life-size statue sculpted by Yiannis Papas was placed in one of Kolonaki’s most central squares (Plateia Dexamenis); and a cruise ship, a theater on the island of Ios, and a hotel in Thessaly have all been given his name. Biographical information and scattered lines from his poetry adorn tourist pamphlets enticing visitors to travel to the Greek islands. Such cultural incorporation comes as a stark contrast not only in relation to the deeper essence of his poetry but also to the ascetic life he had led in his small apartment. Elytis’s poetry clearly resists superficial classifications. His multifaceted style of writing, along with his lucid theoretical formulations, earned him an enduring place in modern Greek literature.

### Works in Critical Context

When *Maria Nefeli* was first published in 1978, it met with a curious yet hesitant public. M. Byron Raizis related in *World Literature Today* that “some academicians and critics of the older generations still [wanted] to cling to the concept of the ‘sun-drinking’ Elytis of the Aegean spume and breeze and of the monumental *Axion Esti*,” and for that reason viewed this new work as “an experimental and not-so-attractive creation of rather ephemeral value.”

**The Eternal Female** The reason behind the uncertainty many Elytis devotees felt toward this new work stemmed from its radically different presentation. Whereas his earlier poems dealt with the almost timeless expression of the Greek reality, “rooted in my own experience, yet . . . not directly [transcribing] actual events,” as he once stated, *Maria Nefeli* is based on a young woman he actually met. Different from the women who graced his early work, the woman in Elytis’s poem has changed to reflect the troubled times in which she lives. “This Maria then is the newest manifestation of the eternal female,” noted Raizis, “the most recent mutation

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Surrealism is often remembered as a movement in the visual arts—painting, in particular. But as its striking images and the way the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated images impressed viewers of the visual arts in the early years of the movement, it is easy to forget that surrealists developed out of a literary school—the Dadaist school—that emphasized sound over reason in their poems. Here are a few more works of surrealism that were produced at the time Elytis worked in the form:

*The Magnetic Fields* (1920), a novel by André Breton and Philippe Soupault. This work is considered the first surrealist novel because its authors utilized the “automatic writing” technique characteristic of surrealism. In “automatic writing,” a writer attempts to write continuously while purposely trying not to think about the words he or she is writing.

*Night of Loveless Nights* (1926), a poem by Robert Desnos. Desnos is considered one of the founding fathers of literary surrealism, and this extended poem about unrequited love is one of his finest.

*Le Paysan de Paris* (1926), a surrealist text by Louis Aragon. This work represents a loving portrayal of the places and people that make up the surrealist movement—a kind of literary portrait—written at the peak of surrealism’s influence.

*The Persistence of Memory* (1931), a painting by Salvador Dalí. In this surrealist work, clocks are depicted as melting and hanging over a tree, a horse, and a desk, thereby exemplifying surrealism’s interest in juxtapositions of unlikely images

of the female principle which, in the form of Maria, Helen and other more traditional figures, had haunted the quasi-idyllic and erotic poems of [Elytis’s youth].” Raizis explained further that Maria is the “attractive, liberated, restless or even blasé representative of today’s young woman. . . . Her setting is the polluted city, not the open country and its islands of purity and fresh air.”

**Lyrical Humanism** Despite the initial reservations voiced by some critics, *Maria Nefeli* has come to be regarded as the best of Elytis’s later writings. Gini Politi, for example, announced: “I believe that *Maria Nefeli* is one of the most significant poems of our times, and the response to the agony it includes *is written*; this way it saves for the time being the language of poetry and of humaneness.” Kostas Stamatiou, moreover, expressed a common reaction to the work: “After the surprise of a first reading, gradually the careful student discovers beneath the surface the *constants* of the great poet: faith in surrealism, fundamental humanism, passages of pure lyricism.”

## Responses to Literature

1. Surrealism is a fairly unique artistic movement insofar as it has influenced artists of various media, including both visual and literary arts. Read Elytis's *Orientalisms* and look at Salvador Dali's *The Persistence of Memory*. In what ways do both works use surrealist elements similarly? In what ways do the two works display different surrealist traits?
2. Read *The Axion Esti*. This text has been said to be indebted to the Greek Orthodox Church. How does Elytis use the themes and language of the church in these poems, either to evoke a tradition or to critique that tradition? In your response, make sure to cite specific passages from Elytis's work to support your claim.
3. Many authors who otherwise were in tune with the artistic ideals of surrealism eventually moved away from the movement because of its communist ethics. Using the Internet and the library, research the surrealist movement's relationship to communism. Then, in a short essay, analyze how surrealist authors—including but not limited to Elytis—and artists use their work to support or refute communist ideals.
4. Elytis loved his home country of Greece and wanted to express its beauty through his poems. Because of the effectiveness of these poems in expressing the beauty of Greece and the Aegean Sea, Elytis has been called a "sun-drinking" poet. Think about your own hometown. If you were a poet who was interested in describing the physical terrain and culture of your hometown, what would critics call you? Why? In order to answer these questions, you might try writing a few lines of verse in honor of your hometown to get you going.

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## Buchi Emecheta

BORN: 1944, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria

NATIONALITY: Nigerian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*In the Ditch* (1972)

*Second Class Citizen* (1975)

*The Slave Girl* (1977)

*The Joys of Motherhood* (1979)

*Destination Biafra* (1982)

*The Rape of Shavi* (1983)

## Overview

Nigerian author Buchi Emecheta is considered one of the most important female African writers, best known for novels that address the difficulties of modern African women who are forced into traditional subservient roles. Her heroines often challenge their restrictive lives and aspire to economic and social independence. Emecheta, regarded by critics and politicians alike as a role model, represents a new and vigorous departure in fiction about women in and from Africa.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Tumultuous Early Life** Florence Onye Buchi Emecheta was born on July 21, 1944, in Yaba, near Lagos, Nigeria, to Jeremy Nwabudike Emecheta and his wife, Alice Okwuekwu Emecheta. Both of her parents were traditional Igbos (an ethnic group in West Africa), and her father was employed as a railway molder. In



Buchi Emecheta Emecheta, Buchi, photograph © Jerry Bauer.  
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Emecheta's childhood, Nigeria was undergoing significant change as many African countries sought their independence in the post–World War II period. The conflict stirred pressures for self-government in many colonial countries, and Nigeria began lobbying Great Britain for greater autonomy. After a series of short-lived constitutions, Nigeria achieved full independence in 1960.

By this time, Emecheta had undergone significant changes of her own. Her mother died when she was young, and she was orphaned as a young girl when her father was killed serving with British troops in Burma, another British colony that had gained its independence in the late 1940s but was marred by internal strife and violence between nationalists and Communists vying for power. After being raised by her extended family for several years, Emecheta was educated at a Methodist missionary school until 1960, when she was sixteen. That same year she married Sylvester Onwordi, a student to whom she had been betrothed for five years.

The couple moved to London so her husband could study accounting, a common occurrence for Africans from former British colonies. As many African countries moved toward and achieved independence, scholarships were created so their citizens could become educated in Europe and the United States, then return and take on positions of responsibility at universities as well as in business and government. The couple eventually had five children—Florence, Sylvester, Jake, Christy, and Alice, but six years after their arrival, the couple separated after Emecheta suffered increasingly harsh abuse at her husband's hands. She was left to raise the children on her own.

**Autobiographical First Books** After leaving her husband in 1966, Emecheta entered the University of London, graduating with a BS with honors in 1972. She also held a post as a library officer with the British Museum in London from 1965 to 1969. Between 1969 and 1976, she was a youth worker and sociologist with the Inner London Education Authority and wrote her first fiction works. Emecheta's first two books, *In the Ditch* (1972) and *Second Class Citizen* (1974), are heavily autobiographical.

The books describe her childhood in Lagos, her 1960 marriage to Onwordi, and their move to England. But the novels—following the early years of her fictionalized self, the protagonist, Adah—also concentrate on her struggle to support and bring up five children alone. *In the Ditch* begins at the point when she has left her husband and is living on her own with her children in a slum, supporting them by working in the library at the British Museum. The book is a collection of “observations” that Emecheta had originally sent to the *New Statesman*, which published them and thereby launched her writing career.

**Continued Struggles** The autobiography of the first two novels continues in *Head Above Water* (1986)—describing Emecheta's continued struggle to bring up

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Emecheta's famous contemporaries include:

**Vladimir Bukovsky** (1942–): Russian author and activist, best known for being a former Soviet political dissident who ran for the president of Russia in 2007.

**Jean-Luc Godard** (1930–): French filmmaker and a pioneer of French New Wave best known for directing such films as *Breathless*.

**Dustin Hoffman** (1937–): American film actor, best known for his roles in *The Graduate* (1967) and *Tootsie* (1982).

**Mick Jagger** (1943–): British rock musician, songwriter, and performer best known as the front man for the Rolling Stones.

**John Updike** (1932–): American fiction writer, best known for his “Rabbit” series of novels (1960–2001) and the novel *The Witches of Eastwick* (1984). He has won two Pulitzer Prizes.

her family as a single parent, to earn a degree in sociology, to find jobs, and to continue to write. The novel ends with the achievement of two major goals: the purchase of a house of her own and her settling down to become a full-time writer. In between, *Head Above Water* explores social conditions in black London and sheds interesting light on Emecheta's development as a writer, as it describes her involvement with each of her emerging novels.

**Emphasis on Social Slavery** The manuscript that the oppressive husband Francis burns in *Second Class Citizen* surfaces as Emecheta's 1976 book, *The Bride Price*. With this book, set in the early 1950s in Lagos and Ibadan, she departs from her own life story. Despite this radical shift in subject matter, *The Bride Price* is a logical development of her writing as she continues to explore the injustices of caste and gender issues.

Emecheta's fifth book, *The Slave Girl* (1977), was published while Emecheta was employed as a social worker. Much of the book is devoted to a description of domestic slavery, the kind that persisted in Africa long after slavery was outlawed. Some Africans, as well as other ethnic groups, continued to sell people into slavery. Because women were not as highly regarded as men in society, young girls were sold for profit by their male relatives. Such girls were forced to become domestics or join the sex trade. The conditions for a domestic servant are paralleled with those of woman's conditions in marriage in her next novel, *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). After an interlude of four pleasant children's books, Emecheta's authorship took a new turn with *Destination Biafra* (1982), which focuses the larger subject of war.



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also emphasized feminist themes:

*As You Like it* (1599–1600), a play by William Shakespeare. In this pastoral comedy, double (or even triple) disguises make way for gender reversals and several humorous misconceptions and mishaps.

*The Birthday of the World* (2003), a collection of short stories by Ursula K. LeGuin. This book explores themes such as gender segregation, marriage between four people, and the disruption of a society whose rulers are "God."

*A Room of One's Own* (1929), an essay by Virginia Woolf. In this book-length essay, the author explores the early politics of women writers and writing.

*The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), a novel by Margaret Atwood. In this dystopian novel, the author speculates on a horrifying future of gender division, reproductive control, and religious totalitarian takeover by the small elite class.

*Women Without Men* (1989), a novel by Shahrnush Parsipur. This explosive novel was banned by the Iranian government for its "defiant portrayal of women's sexuality," and its author was arrested and jailed.

**Career Change** By this time Emecheta had left social work behind and was a visiting professor at the University of Calabar from 1980 to 1981. In 1982, she took a faculty position at the University of London. Emecheta also ran the Ogwugwu Afor Publishing Company, which has branches in London and Ibadan, Nigeria, from 1982 to 1983, and published her next two novels through the publisher. With her 1983 work, *Double Yoke*, she returned to more manageable settings and subject matter, and picked up with her discussions of prejudices. This time the emphasis was on those prejudices of Nigerian men against educated women in Nigeria. Independence for women in Nigeria, according to this novel, was still a leap, and the relationship between the sexes still resembles a war.

*Double Yoke* and her next book carry that imprint. As an allegory about the relationship between Europe and Africa, *The Rape of Shavi* (1983) represented yet another new departure in Emecheta's writing. Emecheta seemed to be searching for the best values in the worldviews of these two civilizations, but as they appear stubbornly incompatible, the author took a middle course. *Gwendolen* (1989) returned to the London black-immigrant theme that Emecheta knew so well. For the first time, though, the main character was not a Nigerian but a West Indian.

**Published Fewer Novels** While Emecheta only published two novels after *Gwendolen*—*Kehinde* (1994) and

*The New Tribe* (2000)—both continued to touch on the author's long-running themes and are set in both London and Africa. *Kehinde* traces the events in the life of a middle-aged, professional woman of Nigerian descent who, after living in London for several years, returns to Nigeria and gains a new appreciation of her accomplishments. In contrast, *The New Tribe* focused on the difficult journey of self-discovery of a young man of Nigerian descent who leaves his adopted family in England to find his roots in Africa, encounters corruption, theft, and illness, and returns to England.

Still based in London, Emecheta continues to hold visiting lectureship posts and returns to Nigeria regularly to visit her family.

## Works in Literary Context

Emecheta has always proclaimed that much of her fiction is based on her own life. She could well echo the words of Johann von Goethe, who said not only that nothing would be found in his writings that he had not experienced himself, but also that nothing in them was in exactly the form in which he had experienced it. Emecheta's early years spent in Nigeria and England have given her material for her most successful novels. The realism of much of her writings has led critics to categorize her as a documentarist.

**Social Influences and Feminist Themes** It is evident that Emecheta was sorely impacted in childhood by gender bias—when, for example, she almost missed getting an education because girls were kept at home while boys were sent to school. Because she negotiated rights for herself, Emecheta was able to receive a decent education. The influence of social values with regard to women is also apparent, as it became an early theme that prevailed throughout her work.

Central to many of her novels is the role of women in present-day Africa. In her fiction, she shows courage by challenging traditional male attitudes about gender roles. She expresses anger and iconoclastic contempt for unjust institutions, no matter how time-honored or revered they are. She also displays a willingness to seek new ways to break what she sees as the unjust subjugation of women in the name of tradition.

*Second Class Citizen*, for instance, portrays a young Adah as an unusually determined little girl whose mind is firmly set on getting a Western education, from which she has been effectively barred because she is "only a girl." This sets a basic theme that runs through Emecheta's entire body of work: an intense anger at the sexual discrimination that is at the core of the culture of her people and a concomitant contempt for the men who perpetuate it. The theme of the slavlike conditions of marriage for a woman is developed in *The Joys of Motherhood*. Even *Gwendolen* (1989), whose main theme is incest, lends itself to the well-known scenario of girls and women oppressed by men and fighting for self-respect.

## Works in Critical Context

Emecheta is praised for her convincing characterizations, thorough presentation of social themes, and vivid sense of place. Because she exposes such African customs as polygamy, servitude, and arranged marriages—as practices that curtail the power and individuality of women—some critics categorize her works as feminist literature. Her feminism, though mild in Western eyes (and though she refuses to be called a feminist), and her criticism of aspects of African cultural tradition have enraged some male African critics, who claim that Emecheta misrepresents Igbo society.

***In the Ditch and Second Class Citizen*** Critics praised Emecheta for her straightforward prose and amusing yet poignant evocation of her heroine's tribulations in the books. Rosemary Bray in the *Voice Literary Supplement* commented, "Both books are simply told, bearing the mark of painful authenticity even before you know they are autobiographical. [Emecheta] wrote them to rid herself of rage at a society and a man who could not accept her independent spirit."

## Responses to Literature

1. Though Emecheta resists the feminist label, the bulk of critical discussion of her work concerns the feminist attitude. In a group effort, take sides to debate whether her works can or should be categorized as feminist. To support arguments for and against, consider scenarios in which women lose their humanity in brutal marital battles, how female characters define their femininity (through sexuality? motherhood?), and where descriptions are or are not attacks against men.
2. Make an effort to list several definitions and types of family. What constitutes a family as you understand it? Then, consider Emecheta's comments on family in *The Joys of Motherhood*. How do your two definitions compare? Where do they differ? What does this tell you about yourself and/or your own family? What does this tell you about the author?
3. Go on a Web adventure to find background research on the Igbo culture in general and Yoruba women in particular (the following Web site at Emory University might be helpful: <http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Yoruba.html>). What are the expectations of men and of women in Igbo culture? What are the values? What in Emecheta's novels demonstrates an opposition to these values and gender role expectations?

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## Shusaku Endo

BORN: 1923, Tokyo, Japan

DIED: 1996, Tokyo, Japan

NATIONALITY: Japanese

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*White Man* (1955)

*Yellow Man* (1955)

*The Sea and Poison* (1958)

*Wonderful Fool* (1959)

*Silence* (1966)

*The Samurai* (1980)

## Overview

Shusaku Endo was one of the most prolific novelists of postwar Japan. Since he began writing in 1955, he published more than 175 books, including forty-five novels and seventeen short-story collections, in addition to scores of volumes of essays, criticism, travel reminiscences, plays, and screenplays. An internationally recognized novelist, Endo is considered one of the most influential and popular writers in postwar Japan.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Early Life in Manchuria** Endo was born on March 27, 1923, in Tokyo, Japan. When he was quite young, his father, Tsunehisa Endo, a bank employee, was transferred to a branch office in Dalian, a city in Japanese-occupied Chinese Manchuria, and the boy moved there with his parents and older brother. (While Manchuria was a region in northeast China, international agreements sanctioned a Japanese presence there, which was resented by



Shusaku Endo Endo, Shusaku, photograph. AP Images.

the Chinese. One point of contention was Japanese control of the key South Manchurian Railroad.)

**Religious Conversion and Schooling** When Endo was ten, his parents divorced, and his mother, Iku, returned to Japan with him and his brother, moving in with her sister's family in Kobe. Endo's aunt was a devout Catholic, and at her encouragement his mother converted to Catholicism. At her urging, her sons attended catechism class, which Endo agreed to do only after he learned that the foreign priest would provide candy. Endo was baptized a Catholic in 1934.

During this time, social and economic policies in Japan were swiftly turning against the importation of foreign goods and foreign beliefs, and an impetus toward purging such alien artifacts and ritually cleansing the land through warfare was beginning. At the age of eleven Endo could certainly not have been aware that his conversion to Christianity was an action directly opposing the growing nationalistic, jingoistic, and antiforeign trends that were reshaping Japan and moving the country toward war.

Rebelling against the influence of his deeply religious mother, Endo moved in with his father. When the time arrived for college entrance exams, though he was a poor student, Endo did well enough to be admitted into the prestigious, private Keio University in 1943. His father was angry when he learned his son had applied not to medical school but to the Department of Literature. Thrown out of his father's house, Endo settled in a dormitory for Christian students.

**Interrupted Schooling** Endo began studies just as war began between Japanese and Western powers. Because Japan wanted to become a major industrial, military, and imperial power, it moved to control other territories, including China, and signed a pact in 1940 with Nazi Germany and Italy to form an alliance against Great Britain and France. When the United States tried and failed to deter Japan and its territorial ambitions with economic sanctions, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, in 1941 hoping to force the United States to accept Japan's recent conquest of the Philippines, Malaya, and Burma. Instead, the United States declared war on Japan and joined World War II in Europe as a member of the Allies.

Because of the war, classes were often canceled and students sent out to perform labor service. Endo worked in an airplane parts factory. Though he never saw armed combat, he was nevertheless impacted by the pressures by classmates or teachers who often demanded to know whether he would choose between the divine emperor of his native land or the God of the foreigners. Endo resented such coercion to choose between one morality and another, and his responses were to later provide the material for his novels.

**Saved by Illness and Christ** To deal with the moral dilemma, Endo began creating a "Maternal Christ," an

image of a personal, pocket-sized Christ that would not compel him to make hard decisions, accuse him of moral cowardice, or send him off to die for a political ideology. This Christ was to appear in his best novels from the 1960s through the rest of his career. Ironically, a serious case of pleurisy—a respiratory disorder in which the membrane that surrounds the lungs becomes inflamed and makes breathing painful—kept him from being drafted.

**Brief Studies in France** Using superior economic and military resources, the United States isolated Japan then launched bombing attacks on its industrial centers. After the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, killing tens of thousands of people instantly in both cities Japan surrendered. In the postwar period, the United States assisted Japan as reforms were implemented and an open society based on capitalism was put in place. One way this was accomplished was through educational opportunities provided to Japanese students.

After the war, on recommendations of a French priest, Endo became part of one of the first Japanese groups chosen for overseas study, and in June of 1950, he sailed for France, where he spent two and a half years studying French Catholic literature at the University of Lyon. He had to conclude his studies prematurely when he succumbed to a serious lung ailment in Lyon and was forced to return to Japan. Shortly thereafter, he began to write. His first novella, *White Man* (1955), was awarded the Akutagawa Prize.

**The Japanese Graham Greene** Endo met and proposed to Junko Okada, a young woman studying French literature at Keio University. She accepted, and they married two months after the ceremony for the Akutagawa Prize had been held. They had one child, Ryunosuke. Endo pursued his lifelong preoccupations with problems of choices and morality in his writing in these years—publishing *Yellow Man*, his second novella and the companion piece to *White Man* (1955); *The Sea and Poison* (1957); and *Volcano* (1959).

In 1959, Endo also published the first of many popular “entertainment” novels that helped earn him the title of “the Japanese Graham Greene.” Novels such as *Wonderful Fool* (1959) and *Song of Sorrow* (1977) continued to grapple with the same moral issues addressed in his serious novels, but they presented these issues in a semicomical, nonreligious way that made them more accessible to Japanese readers.

**Relapse** In 1960, Endo took another trip to Europe to gather materials for a study of the Marquis de Sade (1740–1814), a French writer of psychological and philosophical works best known for his belief in absolute freedom and sexual immorality. There, Endo suffered a major relapse of pleurisy. He was hospitalized for two and a half years and underwent three operations. His novels

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Endo's famous contemporaries include:

**Robert Bly** (1926–): American poet and activist who founded the Mythopoetic Men's Movement.

**Akira Kurosawa** (1910–1998): Japanese director who created classic Japanese-language films such as *Rashomon* (1950) and *Seven Samurai* (1954), and received an Academy Award for Lifetime Achievement in 1990.

**Osamu Tezuka** (1928–1989): Japanese artist credited as the father of the Japanese style of comics known as manga.

**Daniel Inouye** (1924–): United States senator from Hawaii for more than four decades and the first American of Japanese descent to be elected to both the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate.

then changed somewhat. From *Silence* (1966) through *Deep River* (1993), Endo featured the suffering of those individuals physically and spiritually weak and those social institutions that caused the suffering. *Silence* was awarded the Tanizaki Prize for literature in 1967.

**From Lecture Circuit to Theater** Between 1967 and 1969, Endo lectured on the theory of the novel at Seijo University. But his larger interests lay in Kiza, the amateur theater company that he organized in 1968 and that has run, with a few lapses, annually since its founding. Kiza performances—versions of Western classics and an occasional adaptation of a Japanese work—invariably sold out.

**Jerusalem and Jesus** In 1968, Endo became for a time the chief editor of *Mita Bungaku*, Keio University's literary journal. On his way to Jerusalem in March of 1972 to research his next novel, Endo stopped in Rome for an audience with Pope Paul VI. While still pondering the shape his novel would take, Endo wrote a highly idiosyncratic work, *A Life of Jesus* (1973). In this novel and two that followed, Endo focused on his view of accounts and struggles of Jesus in scenes past and present. The results were sometimes shaky, and both critics and readers were disappointed.

Endo's continuing interest in the “Christian century” (1549–1639) also informed his next writings, a series of works that are perhaps most accurately described as contemplative histories in which Endo embraces Christianity, starting with *The Iron Pillory: Konishi Yukinaga* (1977). After several more works with similar themes, Endo published *The Samurai* (1980)—perhaps his most acclaimed novel except for *Silence*. The novel won the Noma Prize. In 1986, Endo published his quasi-autobiographical

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who also investigated themes of spiritual identity:

*Catfish and Mandala* (2000), a novel by Andrew Pham.  
The author visits his native Vietnam to find his true self and his place in two cultures.

*Death of a Naturalist* (1966), a poetry collection by Seamus Heaney. In this volume, the poet depicts childhood, reflects on identity, and focuses on the settings of rural Ireland.

*Jacob Have I Loved* (1980), a novel by Katherine Paterson.  
A young girl feels abandoned by a God who puts her sister first.

*The Last Spin, and Other Stories* (1960), by Evan Hunter.  
Several stories in the collection highlight identity—including the title story, which looks at the impact of gang life on the individual.

*The World of Malgudi* (2000), four novellas by R. K. Narayan. In this collection, the author expresses the values and mores of domestic life and explores what it means to be Indian in modern times.

*Scandal*. In 1993 *Deep River*—his last major novel and a portrait of Christian behavior that transcends all human-made prejudices—quickly became one of his most popular works among Japanese readers.

In October 1995, Endo was in the hospital recovering from a stroke when, on the day before the Tokyo premiere of Steven Dietz's new bilingual stage adaptation of *Silence*, the Japanese government named Endo the newest recipient of the Order of Culture. After frequent hospital stays following his stroke, Endo died on September 29, 1996.

### Works in Literary Context

**Influences** Several influences are apparent in Endo's work. He was most impressed by the writings of Christian novelists such as François Mauriac and Georges Bernanos, but his experiences, which proved generally frustrating, are more apparent as influences. He vividly presented in his fiction images of faith that he shaped through his own experience, his feelings toward his mother (some responses to the wrath of his father), and his literary sensitivity.

**Moral Motifs and Christian Concerns** Endo's writings collectively present examinations of the search for spiritual roots. Although his readers are often uncertain about whether to embrace him as a serious or as a comic writer, Endo was a dedicated, serious thinker

about the cultural gaps separating Japan from the West, the problems of contrasting moralities, and the conflicts between individuals and the institutions that tortured them.

Endo expressed this thought in major works with spiritual and Christian themes. With *Scandal* venturing into psychological drama, for example, Endo explores the question of multiple (and morally contradictory) personalities. With the greater portion of his works from *Silence* through *Deep River*, Endo focuses his sympathy on those weak in both body and spirit and presents features of his forgiving, accepting Christ.

### Works in Critical Context

Critics have praised Endo for the power of his words as well his accessibility to both Japanese and Western audiences. Many critics theorize that it is his Christianity that makes his work more accessible to the Western reader. Many reviewers assert that the issues of cultural conflict prevalent in his fiction are universal themes that make his work powerful and substantive. Endo has been praised as courageous in addressing questions of faith and sin in his work, in which his understated style and his infusion of humor prevent his moralizing from becoming off-putting to the reader.

***Silence*** One of Endo's most critically praised works and the first of his books to be translated into English is *Silence*. The novel is a fictional account of the first seventeenth-century Christian expeditions to Japan, during which Italian and Portuguese missionaries and their followers were persecuted. Of the book, Jean Higgins observed, "*Silence* concerns itself with the theological question of the image of God, Eastern and Western. Yet it does so without dogmatizing or indoctrinating." John Updike wrote in the *New Yorker* that "one can only marvel at the unobtrusive, persuasive effort of imagination that enables a modern Japanese to take up a viewpoint from which Japan is at the outer limit of the world."

### Responses to Literature

1. As a boy, Endo witnessed the conflict between the Manchurian Chinese and the Japanese who had occupied the area. Of his countrymen in Manchuria, Endo later wrote: "The Japanese, brimming with the vulgarity and the high-handedness of the parvenu, strolled these streets disdainful of the Chinese who had lived here for countless years." In a group effort, research the conflict between the Japanese and Chinese in Manchuria. What did the Japanese culture want from the Chinese? How did the Chinese respond to the invasion of the Japanese? Who resisted? Who protested? Reconsider Endo's comment. What tone (or attitude) does he express?



2. Endo's early studies and experiences convinced him that an insurmountable wall separates Western Christian culture from the polytheistic culture of Japan, which celebrates many gods and goddesses. Beginning with his first essay, "The Gods and God," his writings reflect an effort to come to terms with dueling identities—those that positioned him between two worlds. Search an Endo work for either (a) aspects of Western Christianity or (b) aspects of Japanese religion of many gods. In a paper, introduce your choice by pointing out examples from Endo's writing that will help your audience understand the general nature of that world and Endo's frustration at being between those worlds.
3. Endo chose a particularly violent period in Japanese history (a time of intense persecutions of Christians in the early seventeenth century) to show the brutal ways in which society oppresses the individual and makes the practice of a personal faith all but impossible. Why do you think he chose this time period to write about? Create a presentation in which you share your views.
4. Endo's novel *Silence* is primarily an epistolary novel, or a novel in the form of a letter or letters written by the narrator. Try writing a short story in the form of a letter to someone. It can be a real or fictional person, and the events of the story are entirely yours to choose. After you finish, make a list of the ways in which a story in the form of a letter is different from any other kind of story you might write.

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## Hans Enzensberger

BORN: 1929, Kaufbeuren, Bavaria, Germany

NATIONALITY: German

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, essays

MAJOR WORKS:

*Verteidigung der Wölfe* (1957)

*Der Untergang der Titanic* (*The Sinking of the Titanic*, 1978)

*Die Furie des Verschwindens* (1980)

*Kiosk* (1997)

*Wu Warst Du, Robert?* (*Where Were You, Robert?*, 2000)



Hans Magnus Enzensberger Ulf Andersen / Getty Images



## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Enzensberger's famous contemporaries include:

**Gabriel García Márquez** (1927–): García Márquez, a Colombian writer, is best known for his use of magic realism in novels; he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982.

**Fidel Castro** (1926–): Castro was the leader of the successful Cuban Revolution in 1959 and served as the country's leader from 1959 until his retirement in February of 2008.

**Imre Kertész** (1929–): Kertész is a Hungarian Jewish author who survived the Holocaust; he received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2002.

**Jürgen Habermas** (1929–): This German philosopher and social scientist is best known for his theory of communicative action.

**André Previn** (1929–): Previn is a German-born composer and conductor who has won Academy and Grammy awards for his theatrical compositions.

**Anne Frank** (1929–1945): Frank was a German-born Jew who was killed during World War II; she is most famous for the publication of her diary, *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

**John Barth** (1930–): Barth is an American writer who is one of the pioneers of postmodernism in American literature.

### Overview

Hans Enzensberger, considered by many to be Germany's most important living poet, is equally well known as an editor, translator, and social critic who has stirred a variety of controversies during his fifty-year career.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***Growing Up in Nazi Germany*** Enzensberger was born on November 11, 1929, in Bavaria, Germany. He grew up in Nazi-era Germany and at the end of World War II, he was conscripted into a German militia. He survived the war and went on to study literature, languages, and philosophy in various European universities. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on the lyric poetry of Clemens Brentano, a German poet from the mid-1800s who was a leading member of the younger Romantic generation.

***Poetry and Politics*** Enzensberger began his literary career in post-World War II Germany. In 1955 he joined Group 47, an association of authors that encouraged criticism of political and social conditions and was generally opposed to the values and standards of West Ger-

many. For the next decade, he devoted himself to political poetry. The appearance of his first two collections of poetry earned him great notoriety as Germany's "angry young man." From the late 1950s he spent prolonged periods abroad, visiting the United States, Mexico, Italy, Russia, the Far East, Cuba, and Norway before eventually settling back in Germany, in Munich.

By the mid-1960s, he had lost his faith in the political efficacy of poetry; thereafter, he became more actively involved in politics. He founded the political periodical *Kursbuch*. Remaining its editor until 1975, Enzensberger and his magazine became active in the sixties' debates about the writer's role and function.

In 1968 Enzensberger resigned a fellowship at Wesleyan University in protest against U.S. foreign policy and moved to Cuba, his model for revolutionary change. Until the mid-1970s, he focused his writings on revolutionary subjects.

***Social Criticism*** By the 1980s, Enzensberger had finished with his period of revolutionary fervor and returned to the lyricism characteristic of his earlier works. He remained an active social critic throughout the next two decades, however. He produced poetry, essays, and even children's fiction, tackling a wide range of social issues. He stirred up controversy in 1995 with his provocative book *Civil Wars: From L.A. to Bosnia*, which presents a broad definition of civil war that includes inner-city rioting as well as full-blown national conflicts. His works continue to offer readers difficult challenges and to demonstrate the inseparable nature of politics and culture.

### Works in Literary Context

Enzensberger is perhaps the most wide-ranging and protean figure in contemporary letters. During his fifty-year career, he has moved fluidly through the important issues of the day, often influencing the public debate with his poetry and social commentary.

***Germany's "Angry Young Man"*** At the beginning of his career in postwar Germany, Enzensberger was concerned with the state of the language, which he felt was corrupted by war and tyranny, and with the material and spiritual state of his country. For Enzensberger, that conflict takes the form of anger in his early verse. As Helmut Gutmann explained in a *German Quarterly* review, the "irate aggressiveness" of Enzensberger's poems "gave his first two volumes . . . their own unmistakable tone. They are protest and polemics, they denounce and unmask. . . . Enzensberger's anger is directed against a world that he sees dominated by a dehumanizing technological civilization and by the machineries of power that enslave man, be they government or industry, politics or the military, the synod of bishops or the mass media of the 'Bewusstseinsindustrie' (consciousness industry)."

Concurrent with his poetry, Enzensberger began writing essays expressing both his literary and social concerns. He published two volumes of essays during the early sixties. Then, in 1965, he founded a new periodical, *Kursbuch*, to provide a forum for literary and political discussion. The demand that literature be politicized, and subsequent calls for the “end of literature,” were issues hotly discussed in *Kursbuch*. As one commentator noted, “Enzensberger’s contribution gave courage to this belief, and to the idea that literature, as ordinarily and traditionally understood, was on the way out.”

**Combining Lyricism and Social Criticism** Enzensberger’s “declaration of disbelief in literature,” however, did not prevent him from quietly continuing to write poetry. The 1970s saw the publication of various poetic works reflecting the author’s disillusionment with all social systems, as well as an apparent loss of faith in literature’s power to effect revolutionary change. The 1980 publication of *Die Furie des Verschwindens*, a collection of short poems, marked the end of Enzensberger’s sixteen years of revolutionary fervor and a renewal of the lyricism characteristic of his earlier works.

### Works in Critical Context

Called “Germany’s most important literary catalyst” in a 1968 issue of the *New York Times Book Review*, Enzensberger catapulted to fame with the publication of his first two volumes of poetry. Since those early works, the German poet has become equally well known as a social critic. One critic noted that Enzensberger “is more learned, cosmopolitan, and restless” than any of his contemporaries; and that he is “intent on radical doubt [and] does not participate in collective stances for very long.”

The variety and range of Enzensberger’s works make it difficult to summarize critical response to his writing. A brief look at the critical response to a couple of his more provocative offerings can provide a sort of overview to his reception by critics and audiences.

**Civil Wars** Enzensberger stirred up controversy in 1995 with his provocative book *Civil Wars: From L.A. to Bosnia*. Enzensberger suggests that using high-tech weaponry to kill people we have never seen is far more terrible than a war that pits neighbor against neighbor. The book examines the types of violence that have proliferated since the end of the Cold War. His book is a “cluster of lively arguments,” according to Mark Thompson in *New Statesman & Society*, and *Publishers Weekly* claims the book convincingly demonstrates the inseparable nature of politics and culture.

**Where Were You, Robert?** Enzensberger’s *Wu Warst Du, Robert?*, which was translated as *Lost in Time* and published in England as *Where Were You, Robert?*, represents a different kind of offering from his usual poetry and politics. The book is a fanciful tale about a fourteen-year-old boy, Robert, who is capable of time

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Enzensberger’s poetry combines dramatic satire with meditative verse to explore themes of oppression, coercion, and civil unrest. Here are some similar works:

- Odas Elementales* (1954–1959), a poetry collection by Pablo Neruda. This collection of poems demonstrates Neruda’s Communist political views through an extensive description of the everyday world.
- Festivals and Funerals* (1971), a poetry collection by Jayne Cortez. This collection of poems uses excessive language and imagery to expose the oppression of women, particularly African American women.
- Anarchy* (1998), a poetry collection by John Cage. This collection of poems draws on and reworks the writings of famous anarchists to create a series of poetic lectures on important questions of human freedom.

travel simply by blinking his eyes. Robert is not aware of this power until his first accidental journey takes him to the Soviet Union in the year 1956. Robert moves through various historical vignettes, surviving his adventures through his own wit and skill. The history presented in the book is quite accurate, leading D. J. Enright in the *Times Literary Supplement* to call it “a fantasy for people who don’t read fantasy, and perhaps disapprove of it.” A *Publishers Weekly* writer noted the lack of a unifying theme in this episodic book but concluded that the author’s “humorously deadpan narrative voice, his taste for witty ironies and Robert’s sheer moxie offer a surfeit of pleasures in and of themselves.”

### Responses to Literature

1. Read several of Enzensberger’s poems from the 1960s and 1970s. Do his ideas, which were considered radical and controversial at the time, still seem cogent today? Discuss some of the similarities and differences between then and now, analyzing developments in history, culture, politics, and technology.
2. Critics have noted that Enzensberger does not “participate in collective stances for very long.” Does a poet and social critic have a responsibility to remain fairly steady in his or her opinions? In what ways does changeability strengthen or weaken Enzensberger’s status as a social critic?
3. In 1965 Enzensberger founded a political periodical, *Kursbuch*, to explore the important literary and political questions of the day. Write a list of the important literary and political questions of today

and compose an editorial addressing one of these questions.

4. Use *Where Were You, Robert?* as a model to write a short children's story that depicts a time-traveler's adventures in a notable period in the past.

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## ■ Laura Esquivel

BORN: 1951, Mexico City, Mexico

NATIONALITY: Mexican

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

*Like Water for Chocolate* (1991)

*The Law of Love* (1996)

*Malinche* (2006)

### Overview

A best-selling, highly respected author in her native Mexico, Laura Esquivel's first book *Like Water for Chocolate* (*Como Agua Para Chocolate*, 1991) was a crossover success, earning her an international reputation. Esquivel merges folk stories, magic realism, and a feminist perspective in her writing, garnering both popular and critical acclaim. *Like Water for Chocolate* was a best seller in the United States. Employing the brand of magic realism that Colombian Gabriel García Márquez popularized, Esquivel blends culinary knowledge, sensuality, and alchemy with fables and cultural lore.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Child of the "Boom"** Esquivel was born on September 30, 1950, in Mexico City, the daughter of Julio Caesar, a telegraph operator, and Josephine Esquivel. Growing up in Mexico, she was educated at Escuela Normal de Maestros. Esquivel grew up during a time when Latin American fiction was enjoying substantial worldwide popularity, known as the "boom." This was due to authors such as García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, and Mario Vargas Llosa, who hailed from different Latin American countries but together developed and refined the qualities associated with modern Latin fiction. This includes magic realism, or the use of fantastic or super-



Laura Esquivel Esquivel, Laura, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

natural elements within an otherwise realistic story. This magic realist tradition was carried on by Esquivel when she became a novelist.

While teaching kindergarten for eight years, Esquivel became increasingly involved in children's theater workshops. Unable to find adequate plays, she began to write her own and from this she progressed to writing for children's public television in Mexico. Famed Mexican director Alfonso Arau, who was then her husband, encouraged Esquivel to continue writing, training her to write screenplays. She was nominated for the Mexican Academy of Motion Pictures, Arts and Sciences Ariel Award for best screenplay for *Chido Guan, el Tacos de Oro* (1985). She conceived of her first novel *Like Water for Chocolate* originally as a screenplay. However, producers told her the script would be too costly to produce so she transformed it into a novel. The novel achieved overwhelming popularity in her native Mexico where it was a best seller, in Latin America, and in the United States where it spent several weeks on the *New York Times Book Review* best-seller list.

*Like Water for Chocolate* is the story of Tita, the youngest of three daughters born to Mama Elena, the

tyrannical owner of the De La Garza ranch. Tita is a victim of tradition: As the youngest daughter in a Mexican family she is obliged to remain unmarried and to care for her mother. Experiencing pain and frustration as she watches Pedro, the man she loves, marry her older sister Rosaura, Tita faces the added burden of having to bake the wedding cake. But because she was born in the kitchen and knows a great deal about food and its powers, Tita is able to bake her profound sense of sorrow into the cake and make the wedding guests ill. For the remainder of the novel, Tita uses her special culinary talents to provoke strange reactions. The character of Tita was partly inspired by Esquivel's own great-aunt, also named Tita.

**Success Begets Success** Encouraged by the novel's success, Esquivel and Arau decided to produce the film version themselves, with Arau directing and Esquivel penning the screenplay for which she won an Ariel award. Building upon her success, Esquivel published a second novel, *The Law of Love* (*Ley del Amor*, 1996). The book reflects her break with her family's traditional Catholic roots and her interest in Eastern philosophy and New Age ideas. The story opens with the sixteenth-century Spanish conquest of Tenochtitlán, the future site of Mexico City, and the rape of an Aztec princess atop a temple. Many centuries later, the principal actors of this earlier drama reappear as Azucena, her missing soul mate Rodrigo, and planetary presidential candidate Isabel in a confrontation that finally breaks the cycle of vengeance and hatred with love and forgiveness. Packaged as a multimedia experience, the novel includes a compact disc of Italian arias and Mexican love songs as well as illustrations by famed Spanish graphic artist Miguelanxo Prado. The reader is instructed to play the music and look at the pictures between chapters.

Esquivel continues to work and live in Mexico City with her second husband Javier Valdez, a dentist.

## Works in Literary Context

**From Inner Reality to Outer Reality** As Esquivel related to Joan Smith in an interview about her novels, "I am always interested in that relationship between outer reality and inner desire, and I think it is important to pay attention to the inner voice, because it is the only way . . . to develop the strength to break with whatever familial or cultural norms are preventing you from fulfilling your destiny." Despite this resistance to attachment to one's past, food has played a significant role in Esquivel's life since she was a child. Remembering her early cooking experiences and the aromas of foods prepared in her grandmother's house, she told Molly O'Neill of the *New York Times* that "I watch cooking change the cook, just as it transforms the food. . . . Food can change anything." In *Like Water for Chocolate*, Esquivel uses food as a way of making Tita's emotions concrete and tangible. This is a common trait in magic realism and its predecessor, surrealism.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Esquivel's famous contemporaries include:

**Martin Amis** (1949–): English novelist, essayist, and short-story writer. Amis is best known for his novels *London Fields* (1989) and *The Information* (1995).

**Alfonso Arau** (1932–): Esquivel's ex-husband and acclaimed director and actor; he also directed the film adaptation of *Like Water for Chocolate*.

**Martin Scorsese** (1942–): American Academy Award-winning film director, writer, and producer. Scorsese's body of work addresses such themes as Italian American identity, Roman Catholic concepts of redemption and guilt, the violence endemic to American society, and machismo.

**Isabel Allende** (1942–): Chilean novelist who, like Esquivel, uses magic realism in her writing. She focuses on the experiences of women, weaving together autobiography, myth, and realism. She is best known for her contributions to Latin American literature.

**Martha Stewart** (1941–): American business magnate, cookbook author, editor, and homemaking advocate. Stewart has held a prominent position in the American publishing industry for over twenty years, is the editor of a national homekeeping magazine, host of two popular American daytime television shows, and writer of hundreds of articles on the domestic arts.

**Feminine Power** In her essay on the representation of women in Mexican culture, Maria Elena de Valdes credits Esquivel with revealing the power Mexican women exercised in the domestic sphere within a larger culture where they were virtually powerless. Through her focus on domesticity and cooking in her first novel, Esquivel explores the choices that women use to change their lives, to develop their creativity, and to express their individuality. De Valdes argues that *Like Water for Chocolate* has particular resonance with Latin American women. In addition, De Valdes suggests that this novel may serve to illuminate this feminist aspect of society to Latino men.

## Works in Critical Context

Some critics have praised Esquivel for her playful and unique style. Critics such as James Polk and Karen Stabiner credit Esquivel for creating an enticing and entertaining mix of recipes, romance, and magic. Marisa Januzzi points out that in *Like Water for Chocolate*, the author transforms seemingly futile emotions into powerful magical forces, which can alter the character's fate. However, while Januzzi praises Esquivel's imagination,



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Culinary expertise is crucial to human civilization and culture, yet it is often taken for granted in works of literature. Food plays a big role in Esquivel's first novel; the book includes recipes, and the main character, Tita, gets her revenge through her fantastic cooking skills. Here are a few other works that explore the power of food:

*The Flounder* (1978), a novel by Günter Grass. Nobel laureate Grass explores many themes, including world politics and feminism, using the language of cooking.

*Babette's Feast* (1987), a film directed by Gabriel Axel. This Academy Award-winning film records the careful preparations for an extravagant meal cooked by Babette, a Parisian political refugee living in an austere Danish village in the nineteenth century.

*Big Night* (1996), a film directed by Campbell Scott and Stanley Tucci. Two Italian brothers run a restaurant and make a lavish feast to impress a restaurant critic in this comedy of errors.

*Chocolat* (1999), a novel by Joanne Harris. Set in France, this is the story of a young mother and her daughter who open a chocolate shop, bringing unexpected changes to the small town in which they live.

the critic admits that the author shows signs of immaturity in her plot development, a criticism echoed by other reviewers. Many critics cite Esquivel's book as arresting but light.

Critics are even less positive in their reviews of *The Law of Love*. Robert Houston writes: "no amount of razzle-dazzle can hide the fact that *The Law of Love* is seriously, perhaps even fatally, flawed." Many critics agree that the plot is inadequately developed and that multimedia elements, while interesting, neither contribute to nor advance the story.

### Responses to Literature

1. What do you think Esquivel is trying to say about the role of women in her books? What is she trying to say about the roles of men? Does she see both as equals?
2. Using the Internet and library sources, research magic realism and its history. Read at least one title that you find in your research and write an essay describing how magic realism is used in it.

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## Sir George Etherege

BORN: 1636, Maidenhead, England

DIED: 1692, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Comical Revenge; or, Love in a Tub* (1664)

*She Would if She Could* (1668)

*The Man of Mode; or, Sir Fopling Flutter* (1676)

### Overview

George Etherege had a gift for sharp and satiric social observation, but he also had an indulgent streak and an indifferent work ethic. He was one of the great British Restoration period dramatists. He had an expert touch with portraits of vain social show-offs, witty urban gentlemen on the make, and duplicitous young women plotting to get their man. In some ways, however, his greatest character was the persona he created for himself—a diplomat and gentleman of the court with a taste for the fast life.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**A Murky Background** Etherege remains a shadowy figure for biographers. He left only three plays and a handful of poetry, and most of the information about him comes from letters written long after he ceased writing for the stage. Etherege's father was a landowner and a court loyalist, and after he died, George was raised by his grandfather. To provide for him, his grandfather apprenticed him in 1654 to an attorney. Etherege later studied law in London, but he left the profession in 1663 and began working on his first play. He may have traveled in France during this time.

Charles II had only recently been restored to power in England, following the rule of the strict Puritan leader Oliver Cromwell following the English Civil War, which had culminated in the overthrow and execution of Charles I in 1649. Cromwell had restricted theatrical

productions as morally unhealthy, among other efforts at regulating what he and his followers saw as the sinfulness of life in England. When Charles II returned to England after his exile in France, however, he brought with him the French court tastes for extravagance, clever conversation, flirtation, and comic theater. England celebrated his return, and the period dominated by the distinctly un-Puritan character of his reign is known as the Restoration (1660–1700).

Etherege quickly became a player in Charles II's court. William Oldys wrote that Etherege was one of "those leading Wits among the Quality and Gentry of chief rank and distinction, who made their pleasure the chief business of their lives." *The Comical Revenge*, Etherege's first play, probably premiered in March of 1664. One of the crew recalled it as being more successful than any preceding comedy. Its success opened doors for Etherege, and he was soon established as one of the witty group of courtiers including Sir Charles Sedley and John Wilmot, earl of Rochester. King Charles himself attended the opening of Etherege's next play, *She Would If She Could*, on February 6, 1668. This play, which critics have generally considered superior to *The Comical Revenge*, generated less interest at the time. Samuel Pepys's diary contains the following description of the premiere: "Lord, how full was the house and how silly the play, there being nothing in the world good in it and few people pleased in it." The poorly prepared production may well account for the indifferent reception of *She Would If She Could*, which was later quite popular with audiences and critics alike.

Etherege's standing at court, established by two plays and a group of aristocratic friends, was further confirmed by his appointment in 1668 as secretary to Sir Daniel Harvey, England's ambassador to Turkey. He accompanied Harvey to Constantinople (now called Istanbul) from 1668 to 1671, and, upon his return to London, Etherege seems to have taken up the easy, directionless life he had left. Etherege wrote to his friend Henry Jermyn in 1688, "I need not tell you I have prefer'd my pleasure to my profit and have followed what was likelier to ruin a fortune already made than make one: play and women. Of the two the Sex is my strongest passion."

Warned by the careless productions of *She Would If She Could*, Etherege seems to have taken pains to ensure that his third and last play, *The Man of Mode*, fared better. The first recorded performance took place on March 11, 1676. The main character, Dorimant, is probably modeled on the fashionable and notorious Earl of Rochester, a new friend of Etherege's. Rather than being inspired by the play's success to further write for the stage, however, Etherege continued to pursue the pleasures of the court in the company of Rochester and others. There are reports of pranks and tavern brawls. In 1679, Etherege was nonetheless thought respectable enough for knighthood, which

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Etherege's famous contemporaries include:

**Rory O'More** (1620–1655): Irish nobleman and the main organizer of the 1641 Irish Rebellion, the event that sparked the Eleven Years War.

**Oliver Cromwell** (1599–1658): Puritan leader of the of the Parliamentary forces which rebelled against King Charles I in the English Civil War. After having the king executed in 1649, he claimed absolute power and appointed himself Lord Protector for Life.

**Margaret Cavendish** (1624–1674): Cavendish was one of the most prolific, ambitious, and thoughtful writers of the period. Her *Sociable Letters* (1664) gives a vivid, first-person account of her remarkable times.

**Thomas Hobbes** (1588–1679): English philosopher and father of Materialism, or the reduction of all events and thoughts to the effects of physical motion. He argued for a clean break between philosophy and theology.

**Samuel Butler** (1612–1680): English poet best known for his mock-epic poem *Hudibras*, which satirizes the hypocrisy of the Puritans.

he may have purchased rather than earned in order to marry a rich widow, Mary Arnold.

Etherege was appointed as a diplomat to Germany soon after his marriage, and he lived there much as he did in London, continuing to indulge his passions for gambling and women. He had dancing and fencing instructors and enjoyed what opera and other music was available. He gave some time to tennis and more to hunting, but how much he gave to business is debatable. Etherege's final years are even more obscure than his first. He left Germany for France early in 1689, but little else is known after that. The place and date of his death are unknown, although research points to Paris in 1692.

### Works in Literary Context

**Restoration Comedy** Until recently, Etherege has been considered one of the inventors of a genre known variously as the comedy of manners. This type of play is reflective of the lightheartedness of the era that produced it. After years of imposed seriousness during the Puritan rule of Oliver Cromwell, high society was eager for some naughty fun. Etherege's work, like other Restoration-era comedies, suited the tastes of theater-goers. His plays feature explicit sexual situations, drunkenness, rowdy violence, feasting, and revelry—with little worry about morals.



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Etherege's heroes are far from being paragons of moral virtue, but it is hard not to admire them for their wit, charisma, and sheer audacity. Following are some examples of works containing either audacious or notably foppish characters.

"Satire Against Mankind" (1675), a poem by John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. Wilmot, who was good friends with Etherege, wrote biting satires of human hypocrisy while developing a reputation in the court of Charles II as a libertine.

*The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1905), a novel by Baroness d'Orczy. This adventure tale set during the French Revolution features a character with a secret identity: to the public he is an insufferable fop of an English baronet, but in private he is the audacious hero known as the Scarlet Pimpernel, famous for his daring rescues of condemned French aristocrats.

*Elmer Gantry* (1927), a novel by Sinclair Lewis. A smug, womanizing college football player notices the power and money that evangelical preachers are making, so he decides to become one himself, destroying anyone who gets in his way. He is exposed as a fraud, but the publicity only gives him greater status.

*Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003), a film directed by Gore Verbinski. This adventure film features the memorable antihero pirate Captain Jack Sparrow, a man without a social compass, who swaggers and bluffs his way in and out of several tight spots on the high seas.

## Works in Critical Context

*The Man of Mode* Moral issues tended to dominate critical discussion of Restoration comedy up through the middle of the twentieth century. Characters like Dorimant in *The Man of Mode* are seen on the one hand as accurate representations of a court wit of the period, and on the other hand as dangerous role models who can have a bad influence on the behavior of audiences and readers.

In the 1700s, critics such as Samuel Johnson and Thomas Macaulay took the high moral road in condemning Etherege's work, fearing the dangers of "mixed characters" on impressionable young minds. Indeed, this was a view that was common up to the early twentieth century. In 1924, Bonamy Dobrée remarked that Etherege took no positions, and that his plays were "pure works of art" rarely appealing to the intellect and not to be taken seriously.

There have been attempts, especially during the 1950s, to claim great philosophical significance for Etherege's

plays, especially *The Man of Mode*. John Palmer summarizes a century of defense when he calls Etherege an artist who "accurately reflected this period in his personal character, and received a sincere impulse to reflect it artistically in his comedies. . . . His plays are morally as well as artistically sound. He felt and saw the comedy of contemporary life; and he honestly sought and found the means to express it."

## Responses to Literature

1. Do some research into what the words "rake" and "libertine" meant in the period of 1660–1700. What does a "rake" believe, what are the social origins of this type of person, and how is this character type represented in Etherege's plays? How does a "rake" compare to a "fop"?
2. What is a "double entendre," and what is its comic effect? How and why does Etherege use it in his comedies?
3. How relevant is Etherege's life as a context for his writing? Do you feel that Etherege wrote with insight about the people and society he knew best, or did he write an idealized version of people and relationships that were always outside of his own circle and situation? Is it relevant that Etherege did not write about many things he knew from his own life, such as his diplomatic work?
4. William Shakespeare was known for writing plays that appealed to all the social levels of English society. How do Etherege's plays compare in this way? Were they meant to be successful with all types of audiences? If so, how? If not, how do you think this has affected his popularity among modern audiences?

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## Euripides

BORN: c. 484 BCE, Salamis, Cyprus

DIED: 406 BCE, Macedonia

NATIONALITY: Greek

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

*Medea* (431 BCE)

*Andromache* (c. 424 BCE)

*Electra* (c. 420–416 BCE)

*Iphigenia among the Taurians* (c. 414 BCE)

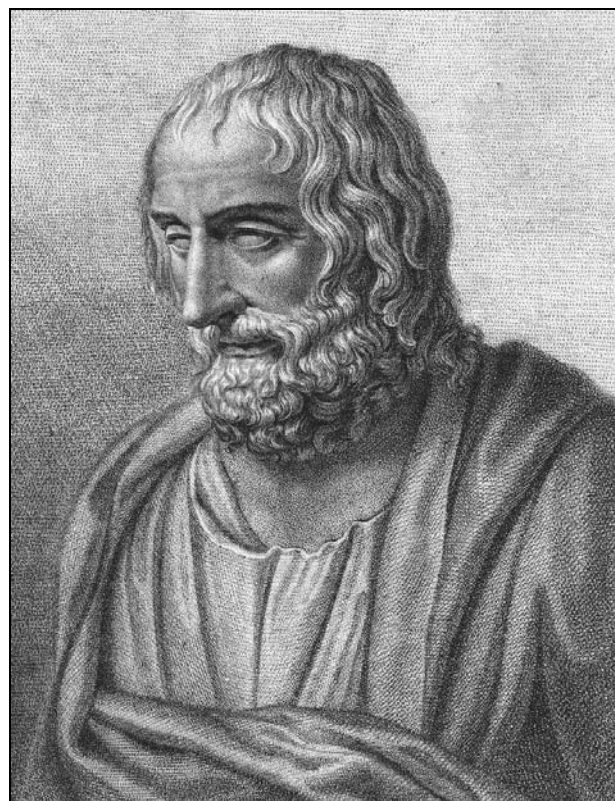
*Bacchae* (c. 406 BCE)

### Overview

Of the three poets of Greek tragedy whose work endures, Euripides is the one whose plays survive in the largest number (eighteen, in contrast to seven each for Aeschylus and Sophocles). His plays are notable for containing both tragic pathos and the nimble play of ideas. In antiquity, at least from the time shortly after his death about 407 or 406 BCE, Euripides was immensely popular and his dramas were performed wherever theaters existed. His influence continued through later antiquity and into the Renaissance and beyond, shaping French, German, Italian, and English literature until well into the twentieth century.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**A Child of Privilege** Euripides was born in 484 BCE to parents who appear to have been affluent (a number of sources report that he was born on his father's estate on the island of Salamis). Several facts corroborate the assumption that he was of at least middle-class origin



Euripides Mansell / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

and means: A pupil of Aristotle's recalled that, as a boy, Euripides was allowed to participate in two religious ceremonies, and he is known to have received a good education. At a time when most literature was transmitted orally, Euripides allegedly possessed an extensive library comprising many philosophical works. His interest in philosophy also manifested itself in his friendships with many of the era's leading thinkers, including Anaxagoras, Socrates, and Protagoras, who was said to have first recited his inflammatory treatise *Concerning the Gods* at Euripides' home. Many readers have inferred that the vicious women depicted in Euripides' plays represent his experiences with and reprisals against several unfaithful wives, but scholars have found evidence of only one marriage that produced three sons.

**Athenian Heyday** Euripides spent most of his life in Athens, which enjoyed one of its most fruitful and influential periods during his youth and early adulthood. Funded by silver from rich regional mines and the tribute of subordinate allies, Athenian culture flourished in the form of democratic statecraft, architecture, painting, sculpture, oratory, poetry, history, and tragedy, the city's particular pride. Every year the Athenian archon, or chief magistrate, selected three playwrights to compete in the dramatic festival, at that time changing from a religious ceremony honoring the god Dionysus into a more secular

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Euripides's famous contemporaries include:

**Pericles** (495–429 BCE): Athenian statesman and military leader who presided over the city's Golden Age and led it into the disastrous Peloponnesian War.

**Socrates** (469–399 BCE): A classical philosopher regarded as one of the founders of Western philosophy, his thoughts (which were never written down in his lifetime) directly influenced the work of such later philosophers as Plato and Aristotle.

**Sophocles** (496–406 BCE): One of the three great Greek tragedians, along with Euripides and Aeschylus, Sophocles wrote at least 120 plays, only 7 of which have survived to this day. He is best known for his Oedipus plays.

**Aristophanes** (456–386 BCE): Another of the great classical dramatists, Aristophanes specialized in comedy and is known to this day as "The Father of Comedy."

**Xerxes I** (reigned 485–465 BCE): The son of Darius the Great, Xerxes led his mighty Persian Empire in a massive invasion of the Greek city-states. After a bloody and costly victory at Thermopylae, Xerxes was defeated at sea at the Battle of Salamis. His army was defeated a year later at Plataea, inaugurating the Classical Age of ancient Greece and the ascendancy (and rivalry) of Sparta and Athens.

artistic competition. Each playwright produced a tetralogy consisting of three tragedies and a lighter "satyr" (or satirical) play; a first prize represented one of Athens's highest honors.

The peace that prevailed during Euripides' youth, however, ended when Athenian territorial ambitions inflamed the city's long-standing rivalry with Sparta over who should be the dominant power in Greece; these tensions, culminating in the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE), drained the coffers and the spirit of Athens. Although Euripides is known to have produced his first tetralogy in 455 BCE, only nineteen of the ninety-two Euripidean plays referred to in ancient commentaries exist today, and all but the first date from after the start of the war.

Invited to produce tetralogies for at least twenty-two Dionysian festivals, Euripides was not notably popular. Whereas his elder competitor Sophocles won about twenty-four first prizes, Euripides garnered only four or five, the last posthumously. Aristotle and several biographers report that, outraged by Euripides' disrespectful treatment of the immortals, the archon Kleon prosecuted him for blasphemy, but no record indicates the trial's

outcome. Late in his career, Euripides sought to leave Athens, frustrated, scholars have speculated, by his relative lack of success at the dramatic festivals, the ongoing devastation of the war, and the city's war-related decline. He eventually left in 408 BCE at the invitation of the Macedonian king Archelaus, who hoped to establish a cultural center rivaling Athens. Continuing to compose at Archelaus's court, Euripides was working on *Iphigenia in Aulis* when he died there in 406 BCE.

### Works in Literary Context

Euripides was one of three playwrights whose works represent the dynamics of Athenian thought at the height of classical drama in the city-state during the fifth century BCE. Euripides, younger than Aeschylus and Sophocles, was more notably affected by the Peloponnesian War. This bitter and protracted conflict ended Athens's Golden Age and contributed to the sense of uncertainty, injustice, and suffering that permeates Euripidean tragedy. Euripides was also more influenced by a contemporary philosophical trend toward skeptical inquiry that accelerated the erosion of belief in traditional religion. The role of the gods in his plays remains controversial. While some critics concede only that Euripides questioned divine benevolence, others argue that he was an aggressive atheist who depicted the immortals' cruelty in order to stir up religious discontent.

Euripides' stylistic and technical modifications further place him as a significant influence on the developing art of theater. Still operating within the structural conventions that governed classical Greek drama, he: adapted the traditional chorus, prologue, and epilogue; simplified word use; increased the representation of female characters; blurred the traditional distinction between comedy and tragedy; and refined psychological realism. Renowned for these innovations, Euripides is perhaps best known for the tragic sensibility—responsive to the decline of Athens and the nature of the human condition—that has rendered him relevant to readers of the modern age.

**Female Protagonists** Of Euripides' nineteen known works, eighteen are tragedies, and all take as their subject matter the divine myths, martial narratives, and noble family histories that literary and religious tradition had established as the requisite subject matter for fifth-century dramatists (Aeschylus and Sophocles often treated the same materials).

Among the most noted of his concerns is the thematic depiction of the conflict between reason and passion; the latter force invariably prevails. This insistence upon the power of irrational emotion, many critics contend, constituted Euripides' rebuttal of the contemporary philosopher Socrates' contention that knowing good is sufficient to doing it. The Euripidean view is particularly evident in *Medea* (431 BCE), whose eponymous heroine anguishes before punishing her unfaithful husband by killing their children and her rival: "I feel the enormity

of the act I am about to commit; but passion overcomes my better resolve.” It is also shown in *Hippolytus* (428 BCE), in which Phaedra struggles against a divinely induced lust for her stepson: “We know what goodness is, and we recognize it, but we do not practice it.” These two dramas also suggest Euripides’ interest in female protagonists, a then unconventional affinity that Aristophanes mocked in his comedy *The Frogs*. In plays such as *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, many of his other known plays, Euripides focused upon the conflicts and the suffering of women.

**Innovations** Known as a stylistic innovator, Euripides is often praised for his psychologically realistic characterizations. Sophocles commented that, while he himself made men as they ought to be, Euripides made men as they are. Although his characters are immortals and leaders, Euripides offered sustained and detailed depictions of their struggles with the emotions of ordinary people. His portrayals of Medea deciding between preserving her children and murdering them to smite her husband and Phaedra struggling between honor and lust for Hippolytus are often cited as the most sophisticated and evocative representations of emotional dynamics in classical drama. Euripides is also noted for rejecting the lofty language previously considered appropriate for characters of high birth, and his use of simple, working-class language further enhanced his characters’ accessibility.

E. M. Blaiklock has described Euripides as “the most historically significant of Greek dramatists,” and, in numerous respects, he left the genre far different from the way it was when he found it. Euripides introduced the innovations that led, in the fourth century BCE, to the so-called New Comedy, a dramatic form resembling the modern play far more than do the works of Athens’s Golden Age. Furthering the secularization of drama by humanizing gods, focusing on human beings, and enhancing realism, Euripides adapted the standard mythic subjects so freely that wholly invented plots and characters became possible in the century following his death. His demotion of the chorus from a continually active and dramatically integrated presence to a group that offered less necessary observations only between dramatic episodes catalyzed the chorus’s eventual disappearance in the breaks between acts. Euripides also established a precedent for Shakespearean tragicomedy when he provided happy resolutions for his otherwise tragic recognition plays.

**Legacy** In the century after Euripides’ death, the Dionysian festival began to favor reviving fifth-century BCE plays over soliciting new works from contemporary dramatists. Lysurgus, an influential Athenian orator and financier, ordered the establishment of authoritative texts for the dramas of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. However, scholars believe that the resulting Euripidean collections became more corrupt than those of Aeschylus and Sophocles because Euripides’ plays were performed more

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Euripides’ *Medea* deals with the horrible revenge extracted by a woman whose husband forsakes her. Here are other works that tell tales of women scorned:

*Cousin Bette* (1846), a novel by Honoré de Balzac. Bette, a “poor relation,” enlists the help of a prostitute to ruin the fortunes of her well-off relatives.

*Vanity Fair* (1847–1848), a novel by William Makepeace Thackeray. The novel’s formidable heroine Becky Sharp uses her beauty, brains, and wit to claw her way into high European society.

*The First Wives Club* (1996), a film directed by Hugh Wilson. Three middle-aged divorcées seek revenge on the first husbands who left them in this comedy.

often and more widely during the following centuries, increasing the likelihood of actors’ interpretations.

After the decline of Greece in the fourth century BCE, Euripides’ works became popular in Alexandria, the North African city that succeeded Athens as the center of Hellenistic culture during the pre-Christian era. Alexandrian book collectors also established a standard text; this version was used in schools and by grammarians. From Alexandria the Euripidean manuscripts were transmitted to Rome and from Rome to the Byzantine Empire, where the plays were frequently revived. Classical scholar A. Kirchoff believes that the nineteen plays known in the twentieth century derive from a collection created during the Byzantine period, in the ninth or tenth century. Our oldest reliable manuscripts of Euripides’ works were all, Kirchoff maintains, copied from this document.

## Works in Critical Context

**Ancient Critical Responses** Euripides’ reception in ancient Greece is indicated by both the number and the nature of the classical references to him. Aristophanes, scholars assume, embedded so many quips about Euripides in his comedies only because audiences were sufficiently familiar with Euripides’ themes to appreciate them. Aristophanes most commonly charged Euripides with misogyny because his heroines were often vengeful, though he also mocked Euripides’ themes as morbid and his speeches as melodramatic.

Sophocles, who praised Euripides’ realistic characterization and ordered that all participants in the Dionysian festival following his death don mourning garb, respected his younger rival, and the inscription on an Athenian monument suggests that its author, allegedly acclaimed historian Thucydides, did as well: “His bones are laid in

Macedon, where he / Ended his life. His tomb? The whole of Hellas. / Athens his motherland. His muse gave joy / To many: many give to him their praise.” Aristotle criticized Euripides’ slack and nonlinear plots but still deemed him “the most tragic of poets.”

**Fourteenth- to Nineteenth-Century Critical Responses** The fourteenth-century Italian poet Dante Alighieri mentions Euripides—but not Aeschylus or Sophocles—in the *Divine Comedy*. In general, the greater number of references to Euripides in scholarly and popular writings of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance indicates that his works were better known than those of his contemporaries. The seventeenth-century French neoclassical playwright Jean Racine, terming himself Euripides’ “disciple,” based his *Andromaque*, *Iphigénie*, and *Phèdre* upon Euripidean works, and his English contemporary John Milton admired “sad Electra’s poet” as well, incorporating lamentations modeled after Euripides’ into his *Samson Agonistes*.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, classicists began to recognize the roots of long-familiar Latin literature in Greek works not previously studied or translated. Coming to understand the characteristics of classical Greek tragedy as exhibited by Aeschylean and Sophoclean works, scholars criticized Euripides’ body of work as impure and inferior because it modified the established tragic conventions. He was more admired during the Romantic period. German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe defended him as “sublime” and attempted to reconstruct the lost play *Phaëthon*; the scholar Ludwig Tieck described his work as inaugurating romantic poetry.

**Modern Critical Responses** Modern critics, more inclined to perceive Euripides’ experimentation as innovative, have commented on the comic aspects of his late plays and the mysticism inherent in his tragic sense. Kitto, among the most influential twentieth-century classicists, asserts that all the fragmentary and illogical components of Euripidean drama contribute to his depiction of an impersonally cruel cosmic force, which can wreak its destruction through the agency of unreasoning human passion.

Critic F. L. Lucas credits him with inventing the “discussion play,” a species of drama later popularized by Voltaire, Henrik Ibsen, and George Bernard Shaw, and traces several stock characters, including the nurse-confidante, the ghost, and the martyred virgin, to him. As author Richmond Lattimore remarks, “Euripides worked in a medium which was not of his own invention or altogether of his own choice, but he made it his own.” That comprehensive adaptation, coupled with a tragic sensibility that suffered the decline of Athens and the

truths of the human condition, has kept Euripides relevant to dramatists and their audiences for over two thousand years.

## Responses to Literature

1. Both *Medea* and *Electra* feature strongly written female characters. Compare the two women and their behaviors. How does each character express her strength? How are they similar? How are they different?
2. Euripides seemed mostly interested in his characters and their developments, often to the detriment of his plots. Select one of his plays. How would you change the plot to make it stronger or to make the ending more satisfying?
3. Are there any contemporary situations you can think of that mirror the circumstances of *Medea*? Write about a recent case of a jealous spouse enacting revenge upon an unfaithful partner. Compare the modern spouse’s actions, and the consequences he or she suffered, to those of Medea.
4. Select a Euripides play and analyze the “falling action”—the arc through which a doomed tragic figure falls. Who were they at the start of the play and when did their fall begin? How quickly did things fall apart for the character?
5. Classical Greek theaters were shaped according to very specific rules and traditions. Research the construction of ancient theaters and how their layouts would affect the staging of plays such as those of Euripides.

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## ■ Mary Ann Evans

SEE *George Eliot*



# F-G

## **Frantz Fanon**

BORN: 1925, *Fort-de-France, Martinique*

DIED: 1961, *Bethesda, Maryland*

NATIONALITY: *Algerian, Martinican*

GENRE: *Nonfiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

*Black Skins, White Masks* (1952)

*The Wretched of the Earth* (1961)

### **Overview**

A political essayist from the Caribbean, Frantz Fanon is chiefly remembered for *Les damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961), a collection of prose denouncing colonialism and racism in the third world. Although his proposal of using violence to obtain political liberation met with heavy criticism, Fanon has been praised as a direct and learned critic of racial, economic, and political injustice in the former colonies of Europe.

### **Works in Biographical and Historical Context**

***A Proud Martinican*** Frantz Fanon was born in 1925 to a middle-class family in Fort-de-France, Martinique, a French colony in the West Indies. One of eight children, Fanon was a sensitive but difficult child who often got into fights with his peers. At school he learned to speak French, sing patriotic French songs, and read French literature and history. Like other Martinicans, he regarded himself as a Frenchman and grew up hearing that the “negroes” in Africa were “savages.” Starting in 1940, France was occupied by the German Nazis during World War II, and the French Vichy government collaborated with the Nazis. Martinique thus came under Vichy command, and the sudden presence of Vichy French sailors blockaded in Fort-de-France, Martinique by Allied forces caused racial tensions to flare. These

experiences began to change Fanon’s vision of Europeans and of race relations.

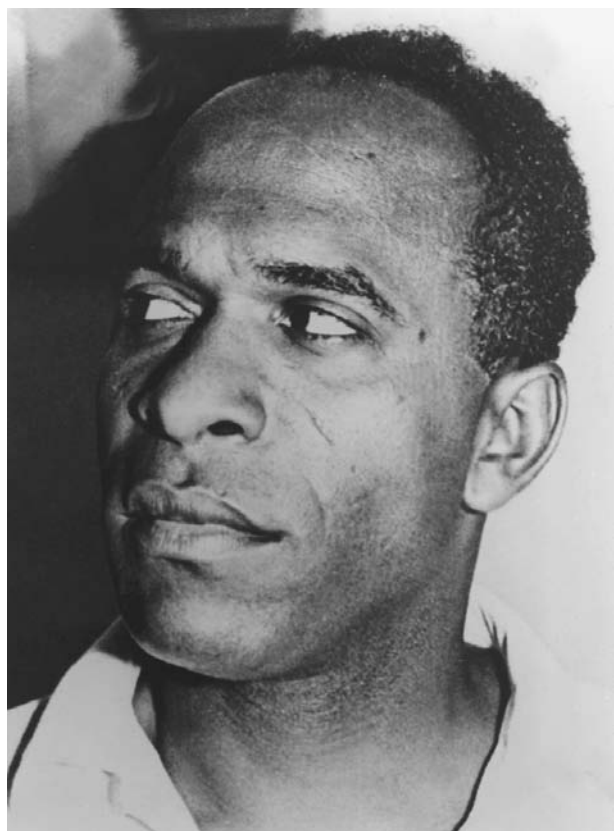
He attended the Lycée Schoelcher in 1941, studying under Aimé Césaire, the great poet of *Négritude*, the Francophone celebration of the power and dignity of black African culture, and he quickly embraced Césaire’s philosophy. Over the next year, Fanon spent much of his time campaigning to get Césaire elected as a member of the French National Assembly.

French general Charles de Gaulle led the Free France movement, urging his countrymen to resist the Nazi occupation. In 1943, inspired by de Gaulle, Fanon joined the French army, where he encountered blatant racism. Disillusioned by his growing awareness of what it means to be black in a white world, Fanon returned to Martinique in 1946.

***Black Skins, White Masks*** In May 1951, Fanon debuted as a published writer when “L’expérience vécue du noir” (“The Lived Experience of the Black”), a chapter from Fanon’s book *Peau noire, masque blancs* (*Black Skins, White Masks*, 1952), appeared in the journal *Esprit*. The book is an essay collection, heavily influenced by the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and Jean-Paul Sartre, that examines black life in a white-dominated world. It is one of the founding texts in postcolonial studies and arguably Fanon’s most influential work. Criticizing attempts by blacks to hide their blackness under a “white mask,” Fanon seeks to expose what he views as the delusory influence of white culture—its inability to define black identity as anything other than the negative image of European values and ideals.

***The Algerian War*** Having successfully completed his medical examinations, Fanon moved to French-controlled Algeria in 1953 to serve as the psychiatric director of Blida-Joinville Hospital. A year after his arrival, the Algerian War erupted, and Fanon quickly aligned himself with the pro-independence political group Algerian Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN). Fanon attended the first Congrès des Ecrivains et





Frantz Fanon The Everett Collection

Artistes Noirs (World Congress of Black Writers and Artists) in Paris in September 1956. Here he delivered his paper “Racisme et culture” (Racism and Culture), later published in *Pour la révolution africaine*.

By late 1956, Fanon was no longer able to accept his impartial role as a psychiatrist working for the French colonialists. He was also at some risk because of his clandestine support for the Algerians. His “Lettre à un Français” (Letter to a Frenchman), first published in *Pour la révolution africaine*, poetically and disturbingly evokes his criticism of those who fled the violence in Algeria rather than become involved. In 1956 Fanon also resigned his position at the hospital, stating that it was useless to cure individuals only to send them back into a “sick” society. Psychiatric disorders were the direct result of societal oppression, Fanon believed, and therefore society must change before one can help individuals. After participating in a work stoppage with other doctors sympathetic to FLN, Fanon was expelled from Algeria in 1957.

In exile in Tunis, where he arrived in January 1957, Fanon resumed his psychiatric practice under the name Fares, and soon started work at the Hôpital Charles-Nicolle, where he established the first psychiatric day clinic in Africa.

Fanon first became an international spokesperson for the FLN in 1958. Using the pseudonym Omar Ibrahim Fanon and claiming to be a native of Tunisia, he visited Rome in September 1958 and returned there in December, this time in transit to Accra, Ghana, as part of the FLN delegation to the All-African People’s Congress. In 1959, Fanon attended the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome, delivering a speech, “Fondements réciproques de la culture nationale et des luttes de libération” (The Reciprocal Foundation of National Culture and Liberation Struggles), which was later published, with minor revisions, in *Les Damnés de la terre*. A little more than a month later, he traveled to Morocco to work on reorganizing medical services for revolutionary forces in Algeria.

Fanon’s service in Morocco suddenly ended when he was injured in an incident variously described as an assassination attempt, a land-mine explosion, or an automobile accident. The back injury he sustained required treatment in Europe. After several weeks of treatment, Fanon returned to Tunis in August 1959 to attend a policy meeting of the FLN. That fall *L’An V de la Révolution Algérienne* appeared. Though it was not successful, it had a significant impact on French “third worldism,” in which disaffected youth rejected the policies of the old Left, instead viewing countries such as Algeria and Cuba as emerging humanitarian or socialist states that offered the true next step in revolution.

In February 1960, Fanon became the permanent representative of the Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Algérienne (Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic) in Accra, recognized as the Algerian ambassador by the Ghana government although he did not have diplomatic status and was identified as Libyan on his passport. He met several leading figures in African independence movements and promoted the cause of Algerian independence among sub-Saharan African nations.

***The Wretched of the Earth*** In 1960, Fanon was diagnosed with leukemia. Throughout spring and summer 1961, Fanon dictated to his wife *Les damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*), which has been hailed as the manifesto of Third World revolution and the bible of black radical groups in the United States. The full text was complete in July 1961 when Fanon met French intellectuals Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in Rome. A short time later, Sartre agreed to write the book’s preface. Fanon’s reputation as a literary and political figure rests on this third book. In this work he argued that political independence is the essential forerunner to genuine economic and social change. Convinced that Western countries had subjugated the third world to exploit its resources and its people, Fanon considered revolution the only feasible path to liberation. He therefore proposed that the “wretched of the earth,” the

poorest of the poor, lead others in political liberation, and he advocated using violence to achieve this end.

A few weeks before *Les damnés de la terre* was published, Fanon suffered a serious relapse of leukemia. Arrangements were made to take him to the United States for treatment, although he initially opposed the idea. He underwent treatment but died of complications arising from pneumonia on December 6, 1961. His body was returned to Tunisia and buried across the battle lines on the Algerian frontier. His anonymous articles from *El Moudjahid* and other works were assembled with the help of his wife and published as *Pour la révolution Africaine* in 1964, while some of his psychiatric publications were gathered in a 1975 issue of the journal *Information psychiatrique*.

### Works in Literary Context

The political climate of the early and mid-twentieth century ensured that a predominantly white culture would try to maintain its position in the world following the era of colonization. Blatant racism revealed itself in Europe through the dictatorships of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. Combined with the socialist fervor that emerged in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, a virulent political ferment came into being that strongly influenced Fanon's worldview.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, according to *New York Times Book Review* writer Robert Coles, Fanon draws on his experiences with racism and on his background in philosophy and literature, particularly the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and Sartre, to examine black life in a white-dominated world and the black man's futile attempt to hide his blackness under a "white mask." Works cited throughout this book point to Fanon's familiarity with African American novels, particularly works by Richard Wright and Chester Himes.

### Works in Critical Context

Critics are divided over the significance and ethical value of Fanon's writings. Albert Memmi, for example, argued that Fanon overestimated the leadership role of the Third World poor. Furthermore, he found Fanon's theory of violence "disturbing and surprising for a psychiatrist." Similarly, Lewis Coser regarded Fanon as an "apostle of violence" with an "evil and destructive" vision. In contrast, Dennis Forsythe proclaimed Fanon a "great symbolic hero" whose vision energized civil rights movements across the world. Emile Capouya also reminded Fanon's critics that "violence is the essential feature of colonialism at all times; Fanon did not invent it." According to Aimé Césaire, Fanon advocated violence in order to create a nonviolent world: "[Fanon's] violence, and this is not paradoxical, was that of the nonviolent." Conor Cruise O'Brien argues: "Violence is not, as Fanon often seems to suggest, a creation of colonialism. On the contrary, colonialism is a form of

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Fanon's famous contemporaries include:

**Ahmed Ben Bella** (1918–): One of the leaders in the Algerian War and the first president of Algeria after its independence from France; considered by many to be the father of the Algerian nation.

**Aimé Césaire** (1913–): Martinican poet and author, mayor of Fort-de-France, Martinique's capital, and member of the French National Assembly; promoted a specific Martinican identity, separate from that of the French.

**Fidel Castro** (1926–): Prime minister of Cuba from 1959 to 2008; leader of the Cuban Revolution (1956–1959), which overthrew the government of dictator and general Fulgencio Batista in favor of a Marxist government.

**Simone de Beauvoir** (1908–1986): French author and philosopher known for *The Second Sex*, one of the formative books of the feminist movement.

**Jean-Paul Sartre** (1905–1980): French existentialist who advocated the view that without God, people must develop their own sense of personal responsibility and meaning in life.

violence: a form developed by the most tightly organized and most effectively violent human societies.... In this respect, it seems to me that Fanon overrates the originality of colonialism."

According to Barbara Abrash, "*The Wretched of the Earth* is an analysis of racism and colonialism, and a prescription for revolutionary action by which colonized men may redeem their humanity." Fanon firmly believed that violence was the only way to bring down an intolerable, oppressive society. Robert Coles, however, reflected that Fanon's impact lies not only in his message but also in his sheer determination to deliver it, observing that

since he is writing to awaken people, to inform them so that they will act, he makes no effort to be systematic, comprehensive, or even orderly. Quite the contrary, one feels a brilliant, vivid and hurt mind, walking the thin line that separates effective outrage from despair.

### Responses to Literature

1. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about Malcolm X, a well-known leader in the civil rights movement in the United States who was criticized for urging black Americans to seize their rights "by any means necessary." Malcolm X was influenced by Fanon's work. What do you think Fanon would have thought of Malcolm? Would

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Foremost among the themes in Fanon's works is the passionate exploration of the interplay between racism and social justice. Here are some other titles that explore various aspects of social justice:

*I, Rigoberta Menchú* (1983), a work of fiction by Rigoberta Menchú. This fictionalized memoir describes the situation of the indigenous Guatemalans during the Guatemalan Civil War and the brutal treatment they faced; the author won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 "in recognition of her work for social justice and ethnocultural reconciliation based on respect for the rights of indigenous peoples."

*Invisible Man* (1952), a novel by Ralph Ellison. This classic American novel tells the tale of a young African American man and his search for identity in a world that bases everything on the color of one's skin.

*Native Son* (1940), a novel by Richard Wright. Another American classic, this tells the tragic story of a poor African American male who eventually fulfills the miserable expectations that society has imposed on him.

*Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (2003), a non-fiction work by Robert J. C. Young. This book shows concrete examples of what it means to live in a post-colonial country, and how that is a stimulus to further political activity.

*Untouchable* (1935), a novel by Mulk Raj Anand. This novel tells the story of one day in the life of a man in the "untouchable" Indian caste, considered the lowest of the low in traditional Indian culture.

Fanon have been proud? What do they share in their social outlooks?

2. We often use stereotypical images as shorthand: "typical woman driver," "acting white," "talking black," "that's so gay." Choose any stereotype-reinforcing phrase that you or your friends or family commonly use. Research the actual facts behind it—for example, for "typical woman driver," look up driving statistics; for "talking black," research language use among different social classes and ethnic groups—and write an essay about your findings and your reactions to the phrase now that you have some more knowledge about its origins.
3. Revolutions usually, but not always, involve violence. Using your library's resources and the Internet, research the Algerian War and the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia (now the nations of the Czech Republic and Slovakia). Write an essay analyzing why one revolution involved violence and the other did

not. What conditions led to the difference? Can you draw any overall conclusions?

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## Nuruddin Farah

BORN: 1945, Baidoa, Somalia

NATIONALITY: Somali

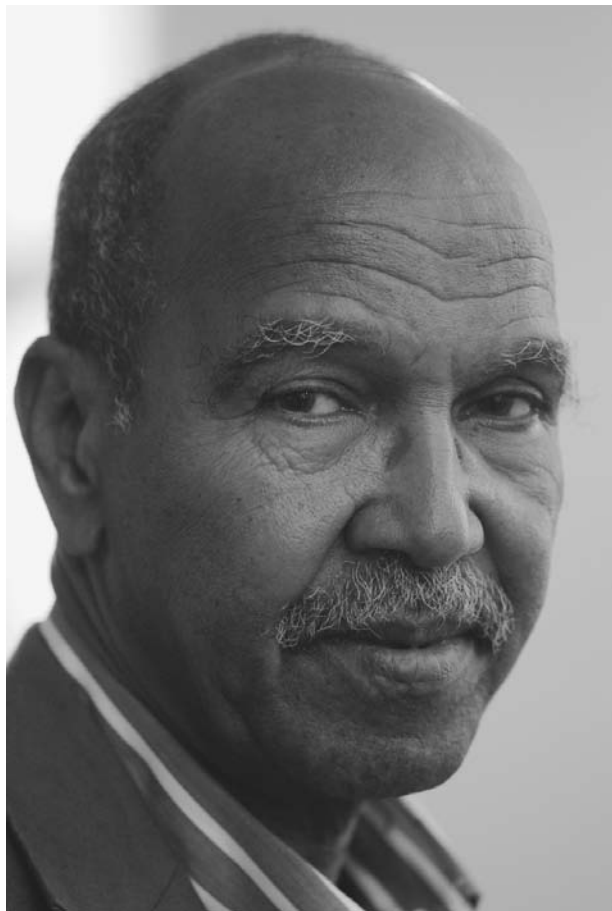
GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

- From a Crooked Rib* (1970)
- Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979)
- Sardines* (1981)
- Maps* (1986)

### Overview

An important figure in contemporary African literature whose fiction is informed by his country's turbulent history, Farah combines native legends, myths, and Islamic doctrines with a journalistic objectivity to comment on his country's present autocratic government. His criticism of traditional Somali society—in particular, the plight of women and the patriarchal family structure—has made him an "enemy of the state," and he has lived in voluntary exile in England and Nigeria. Kirsten Holst Petersen



Nuruddin Farah Ulf Andersen / Getty Images

described Farah's "thankless task" of writing about the oppressed: "Pushed by his own sympathy and sensitivity, but not pushed too far, anchored to a modified Western bourgeois ideology, he battles valiantly, not for causes, but for individual freedom, for a slightly larger space round each person, to be filled as he or she chooses."

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

#### *Early Life in a Tradition of Rich Oral Culture*

Born in 1945 in Baidoa to Hassan Farah (a merchant) and Aleeli Faduma Farah (a poet), Nuruddin Farah was educated at first in the Ogaden, a Somali-populated area now in Ethiopia. His first languages as a child were Somali, Amharic, and Arabic, followed by Italian and English. From these early years one can see two important features that were to dominate his writing life. First, he was brought up in a tradition with a rich oral culture, in which poetry is a craft that takes years to master. Poetry enters political debates in a sophisticated manner, epic or satirical but also oblique and allusive, and plays an important social function. Some of Farah's relatives,

including his mother, are known masters of the genre. Second, the history of colonization and borders gave him early access to a wide range of cultures: his travels and readings made him a cosmopolitan writer, a world nomad who was to write from a distance about Somalia, "my country in my mind," as he once called it.

In 1965 his novella *Why Die So Soon?* brought him to public attention in his country and into contact with the Canadian writer Margaret Laurence, then in Somalia. While a student at the University of Chandigarh in India (1966–1970) he wrote—in two months—*From a Crooked Rib* (1970), a novel that has maintained its popularity for the past thirty-eight years.

***Uncertain Future and Coup in Somalia*** In 1969 a coup gave power to the military regime of Siad Barre, replacing the democratic government that came to power in 1960 when Somalia gained its independence from Italy. In 1970 Farah went back to Somalia with his Indian wife, Chitra Muliyl Farah, and their son, Koschin (born in 1969). Farah then taught at a secondary school and finished his second novel, *A Naked Needle*. The publisher accepted it but agreed to hold it, until 1976, due to political uncertainty in Somalia. It describes the debates among the elite in the capital, the "privilegentzia"—the privileged—and the tentative hopes in the new "revolution." Later Farah rejected this early book as irrelevant and refused to have it reprinted: "It was not the answer to the tremendous challenge the tyrannical regime posed," he says in "Why I Write" (1988).

***Censorship and Exile*** In 1972 the Somali language was given an official transcription and dictionary; what was spoken by the whole nation could become a national literary language. It was for Farah the long-awaited opportunity to write fiction in his mother tongue and thereby speak directly to his people. In 1973 he started the serialization of a novel titled "Tolow Waa Talee Ma ...!" in *Somali News*, but the series was interrupted by censorship. Farah, then on a trip to the Soviet Union, was advised not to run any more risks. Thus he began a long exile from his country.

***Extending Political Themes in Fiction*** His visit to the Soviet Union extended to a trip through Hungary, Egypt, and Greece in the days of the Siad Barre military regime. From this contact with various types of political power came his first major novel, *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979). It had to be written in English, since Farah could no longer be published at home. But this imposed language, implicitly creating an international readership, extended the scope of his fictional exploration of political themes. With this novel Farah started a trilogy he calls "Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship," which has much relevance inside and outside Africa.

His next novel, *Maps* (1986), began another trilogy known as the "Blood in the Sun" trilogy. These works were set amid the real-life Ogaden War, a territorial

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Farah's famous contemporaries include:

**Chinua Achebe** (1930–): Nigerian author of *Things Fall Apart* (1958), the most widely successful African novel ever published.

**V. S. Naipaul** (1934–): Trinidad-born author and Nobel Prize winner whose 1979 novel, *A Bend in the River*, concerned a Muslim living in an African country recently granted its independence.

**Gloria Steinem** (1934–): Outspoken American feminist, writer, and cofounder of *Ms.* magazine.

**Benazir Bhutto** (1953–2007): Extremely popular Pakistani politician who went into a self-imposed exile in 1998. In 2007, she returned to Pakistan to run for office but was assassinated on December 27, 2007, within weeks of the upcoming election.

**Siad Barre** (1919–1995): This army commander came to power after the assassination of President Abdirashid Ali Shermarke and the military coup of 1969; after replacing the democratic government with his military regime, Barre held power as the Head of State of Somalia until 1991.

dispute fought between Somalia and Ethiopia in the 1970s. In 1996, Farah once again returned to his home country, which was then under the weak control of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). This mirrors the events in his 2007 novel *Knots*, in which a Somali woman who has lived most of her life in Canada returns to her native country to discover the devastation caused by the local warlords. Farah also wrote *Yesterday, Tomorrow: Voices from the Somali Diaspora* (2000), a nonfiction book that chronicles the lives of Somalis forced to flee from the country after the collapse of the government in 1991. In 1998 Farah was awarded the prestigious Neustadt International Prize for Literature and is regarded by many as one of Africa's most significant literary figures of the twentieth century.

### Works in Literary Context

Nuruddin Farah's novels are an important contribution to African literature. He writes about his country, Somalia, but the interest is more than regional: The books present the theme of individual freedom in the face of arbitrary power in a way that is relevant outside Africa as well, and they do so with an intellectual and poetic control that makes him one of the most stimulating prose writers in Africa today. Influenced by the work of authors in his extended family, the guiding topic for the majority of Farah's work is the plight of women in Somalia. Nur-

uddin's novels were not well-received by the military regime in Somalia, however, he did receive mild praise from critics abroad.

**Linking Freedom with Feminism** In the slim novel *From a Crooked Rib*, a young Somali woman, Ebla, leaves her nomad community to avoid an arranged marriage, and in her quest for independence she finally finds a kind of stability in the capital, Mogadishu, living with two men of her choice. The journey to freedom can be read as an allegory of the birth of Somalia as a new nation. But the attraction of the book lies in the sensitive portrayal of a young peasant woman, illiterate but not naive, aware of her low status in society but always clear-eyed and resourceful. It came as a surprise to readers to realize how well the young writer, male and Muslim, could represent a woman's perception of herself, her body, and the world.

*Sardines* (1981) is another of Farah's strikingly feminist novels. The story focuses on the world of women hemmed in together in their houses, women who are like children hiding in closets when they play the game "sardines." Medina, a journalist, has decided that her daughter, Ubax, aged eight, is not going to go through the ritual clitoral excision and infibulation performed on all Somali women according to custom. Medina is pitted against her ineffectual husband and the power of her mother and mother-in-law. Although ideological debates play an important part in the story, the main weight of the meaning is again carried by a dense metaphorical network: natural images—fire, water, and birds—show how the balance in the fertility cycles is broken by the socially enforced clitoral circumcision, seen by Farah as a deliberate maiming of women. Again the issue is not merely feminism; it is connected with overall political oppression: "Like all good Somali poets," Farah told Julie Kitchener, "I used women as a symbol for Somalia. Because when the women are free, then and only then can we talk about a free Somalia." In *Sardines* Farah touches a taboo subject as a warning to his compatriots, but also to all nations where, according to him, the subjection of women paves the way for the establishment of tyranny.

**Advocating Human Rights** Farah is generally acknowledged, along with Sembene Ousmane and Ayi Kwei Armah, whose female characters also possess the same vision as Farah's women, as one of the African writers who has done the greatest justice in championing human rights through his work. His influence extends beyond the world of literature to include political and cultural realms, particularly with regard to gender inequality.

### Works in Critical Context

Critics have praised the uniqueness of Farah's writing. "The novels are, in the widest sense, political but are never simplistic or predictable," declares Angela Smith



in *Contemporary Novelists*. The author's first two novels, *From a Crooked Rib* (1970) and *A Naked Needle* (1976), were both written before his self-imposed exile from his home country. He is better known, however, for his trilogy of novels about the collapse of democracy in Somalia known as "Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship."

***From a Crooked Rib and A Naked Needle*** He depicted the inferior status of women in Somali society in his first novel, *From a Crooked Rib* (1970), the first work of fiction to be published in English by a Somali author. According to Kirsten Holst Petersen, who has called Farah "the first feminist writer to come out of Africa," *From a Crooked Rib* will likely "go down in the history of African literature as a pioneering work, valued for its courage and sensitivity." Other critics believe the work is substandard, however. Florence Stratton wrote: "Stylistically and technically, *From a Crooked Rib* is a most unsatisfactory piece of work. It does not prepare the reader for the elegant prose, intricate structures, or displays of technical virtuosity of the later novels." Farah's next novel, *A Naked Needle* (1976), revolves around a British-educated young man, Koschin, whose search for a comfortable existence in post-revolutionary Somalia is complicated by the arrival of a former lover from England who intends to marry him. Reinhard W. Sander observed: "Next to Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, [*A Naked Needle*] is perhaps the most self-searching [novel] to have come out of post-independence Africa."

***The "Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship" Trilogy*** These works document the demise of democracy in Somalia and the emerging autocratic regime of Major General Muhammad Siyad Barre, referred to as the "General" in this series. The first volume of the trilogy, *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979), focuses upon a political activist whose attempts to uncover the circumstances of his twin brother's mysterious death are thwarted by his father, a former government interrogator and torturer. *Sardines* (1981), the next installment, depicts life under the General's repressive administration and examines social barriers that limit the quest for individuality among modern Somali women. Critics admired Farah's realistic evocation of his heroine's tribulations. Charles R. Larson stated: "No novelist has written as profoundly about the African woman's struggle for equality as has Nuruddin Farah." *Close Sesame* (1982), the final volume of the trilogy, concerns an elderly man who spent many years in prison for opposing both colonial and post-revolutionary governments. When his son conspires to overthrow the General's regime, the man's attempts to stop the coup cost him his life. According to Peter Lewis, "*Close Sesame* analyzes the betrayal of African aspirations in the postcolonial period: the appalling abuse of power, the breakdown of national unity in the face of tribal rivalry, and the systematic violation of language itself."

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Farah's novels are notable for their concern with the problems experienced by women in his native Somalia. Indeed, Farah has been credited with writing the first feminist novel to come out of Africa. However, feminism in literature dates back at least to the late eighteenth century, and has been produced in many cultures around the world. Here are a few more prominent feminist texts that argue that women deserve more freedom than society then allowed them:

*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), a treatise by Mary Wollstonecraft. This work, written by the mother of Mary Shelley—the author of *Frankenstein*—is one of the first to present an argument for women's rights in general, and the right to an education in particular.

*The Feminine Mystique* (1963), a nonfiction work by Betty Friedan. In this work, Friedan discusses the stifling nature of the role to which women were relegated at that time in America: the role of housewife, a position that she finds "terrifying" because of the loneliness the housewife must feel to be all day cut off from interactions with other adults.

*The Subjection of Women* (1869), an essay by John Stuart Mill. Arguing against the patriarchal system in which he lived and in favor of equality between the sexes, John Stuart Mill became one of the first major authors to support the burgeoning feminist movement.

*A Room of One's Own* (1929), an essay by Virginia Woolf. One of the arguments made against the equality of men and women in the artistic sphere during Woolf's lifetime was that women had not proven themselves capable of producing high art. Woolf argued that women would produce high art if aspiring female artists had their own money and "a room of one's own," just as men have, to explore their innate talents.

## Responses to Literature

1. Both Farah's *Sardines* and Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* deal with, in one way or another, the sexuality of women and the role that societal conventions play in a woman's perception of her body. Read these texts, and then, in a short essay, compare how each of these authors approaches these delicate subjects. Who seems to be the intended audience for each text? Based on the text, what changes do you think each author would like to see made in society? Make sure to cite specific passages from each text in support of your argument.
2. Farah has been praised for his ability to write from a female's point of view, considered by some a difficult task for a man. Read *From a Crooked Rib*. In a short



essay, describe the narrative techniques, turns of phrases, and other details of the novel that make Farah's portrayal of his female protagonist so effective.

3. In his book *Sardines*, the balance in the fertility cycles is broken by the socially enforced clitoral circumcision. Forced female circumcision has persisted in many African countries, despite attempts by outside agencies, and authors like Farah, to put an end to the practice. Using the Internet and the library, research the history of forced female circumcision in Africa—its origins, its purpose, and its significance—and then write a short essay in which you explore the question: Why does forced circumcision persist in these countries? Describe your emotional reaction to the inclusion of this issue in Farah's novel.
4. Read *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship*. This trilogy is meant to depict the political changes in Somalia and includes references to real-life figures. After having read the text, use the Internet and the library to research events described in Farah's text. Which events does Farah choose to fictionalize or exaggerate in his trilogy? In your opinion, why does he choose these events to fictionalize and not others?

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## George Farquhar

BORN: 1677, Londonderry, Ireland

DIED: 1707, London

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

*Love and a Bottle* (1698)

*The Constant Couple* (1700)

*The Recruiting Officer* (1706)

*The Beaux Stratagem* (1707)

### Overview

A notable dramatist of the Restoration period, George Farquhar was instrumental in reforming the theatrical practices of his age. For the most part, his most famous plays, *The Recruiting Officer* and *The Beaux Stratagem*, maintain the witty, vulgar, cynical, and amoral tone characteristic of Restoration drama, also known as comedy of manners. However, Farquhar's work demonstrates a



George Farquhar © Topham / The Image Works

natural humor, warmth, and joy for life that the writing of his contemporaries lacked. Because of the lighthearted and somewhat idealistic remarks in his plays, Farquhar is considered by some to have signaled the end of Restoration comedy by moving toward sentimental drama.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**The English Restoration** Farquhar was born at a time when England had only recently recovered from a violent civil war, during which the ruling English monarchy was removed from power. In its place, a commonwealth led by Puritan military commander Oliver Cromwell was created. Under Cromwell's strict rule, theaters throughout England were closed down due to their alleged debasement of moral values. When the monarchy was finally restored to power in 1660 under the rule of Charles II—hence the term “Restoration”—theaters were once again opened, and the exuberant feelings of the day made their way into the comedies that became popular during that time.

Born in Londonderry, Ireland, Farquhar's education began with his attending the Londonderry Free Grammar School under the instruction of Ellis Walker, an educator who acquired local fame for having his students perform the comedies of Terence, an ancient Roman writer, and William Shakespeare. In 1694 Farquhar entered Trinity College in Dublin as a sizar, or a student who performs menial duties for a small allowance, but his studies ended abruptly in 1696 when he left Trinity without a degree. Some biographers speculate that he may have been expelled from the college.

**Accidental Stabbing** Farquhar joined Dublin's Smock Alley Theatre, where he became acquainted with stage life and began a lifelong friendship with the Irish actor Robert Wilks. Farquhar was a poor actor who had a thin voice and occasionally suffered from stage fright. His acting career ended in 1697 after he accidentally stabbed and seriously injured a fellow player during a dueling scene. Nonetheless, his theater experience proved invaluable in helping him gain an understanding of both the potential and the limitations of the stage.

Encouraged by Wilks to try writing comedies, Farquhar traveled to London and contacted Christopher Rich, manager of the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, where Farquhar's first play, *Love and a Bottle*, was successfully produced in 1698. Early audiences treated the play with good-natured praise. Compared to Farquhar's later comedies, *Love and a Bottle* seems old-fashioned in its determination to be bawdy, its reliance on stock characters and plot devices, its harsh treatment of the cast mistress, and its focus on sexual pursuit. With this first drama, Farquhar tested his theatrical skills, but he created little that was new or influential.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Farquhar's famous contemporaries include:

**Barthold Heinrich Brockes** (1680–1747): This German poet translated Alexander Pope's *Essays on Man* into German.

**Isaac Watts** (1674–1784): Watts was an English songwriter who penned over seven hundred hymns.

**Antonio Vivaldi** (1678–1741): An Italian priest, Vivaldi was also a preeminent and prolific Baroque composer known for his work *The Four Seasons*.

**Anne Marie of Orléans** (1669–1728): Queen of Savoy and Sardinia, Anne Marie of Orléans was also the grandmother of King Louis XV of France.

**Jiang Tingxi** (1669–1732): This Chinese painter edited the encyclopedia *Complete Collection of Ancient and Modern Writings and Charts*.

**Ludvig Holberg** (1684–1754): Holberg was a Norwegian historian and playwright who is considered the founder of Danish literature.

**Attempt at Fiction Writing** The year his first play appeared on stage, Farquhar was not yet completely committed to drama as a vocation, for he anonymously published a novella, *The Adventures of Covent-Garden*, a few weeks after *Love and a Bottle* opened. *The Adventures of Covent-Garden* was supposedly based on Antoine Furetiere's *Scarron's City Romance, Made English* (1671). None of Farquhar's early biographers attributed the novella to him. In 1795, Isaac Reed reproachfully noted in his copy that Farquhar plagiarized a bit from it for *The Constant Couple*. Indeed, Farquhar's novella introduced plots and dramatic theory that he expanded in later works. Leigh Hunt, who had acquired Reed's copy, was the first to recognize that Farquhar himself was the author of the novella. Hunt said Farquhar was the author described in the novella as “a young gentleman somewhat addicted to poetry and the diversions of the stage.”

**Fame** The success of Farquhar's second play, *The Constant Couple; or, a Trip to the Jubilee*, affirmed Farquhar's ability as a playwright. It features the character of Sir Harry Wildair, played by Wilks, whose tremendous popularity inspired Farquhar to write *Sir Harry Wildair: Being the Sequel of the Trip to the Jubilee*. An unexpected failure, it received little critical attention and was the first in a series of unsuccessful productions. In 1703, likely supposing she was wealthy, Farquhar married a widow who, he soon discovered, was penniless. Farquhar left London the following year to accept a commission as a lieutenant of Grenadiers in the army. Farquhar's service on a recruiting campaign in England's west country

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The life of a soldier has long been the subject of literature, art, and, more recently, film. Here are some other works about the lives of soldiers:

*The Iliad* (twelfth century BCE), an epic poem by Homer.

This classic tale of the Trojan War focuses on the dispute between Greece's greatest warrior, Achilles, and his commander, Agamemnon.

*The Barracks Thief* (1984), a novella by Tobias Wolff.

Wolff describes the lives of paratroopers in training to join the Vietnam War.

*All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), a novel by Erich Maria Remarque. This famous novel about a German soldier serving during World War I is one of the most widely read war novels of all time.

*Black Hawk Down* (2001), a film directed by Ridley Scott.

Based on a true story, this movie tells the story of an elite group of soldiers who have been sent to Somalia to capture a corrupt warlord.

*Jarhead* (2003), a memoir by Anthony Swofford. Swofford describes his role as a sniper in the First Gulf War.

inspired one of his most famous pieces, *The Recruiting Officer*—an immediate success upon its production in 1706. Despite his revived fame, the final years of Farquhar's life were marred by poverty and failing health. Living in London, Farquhar received enough financial support from Wilks to work on his last play, *The Beaux Stratagem*. Completed in only six weeks, it is regarded by many to be Farquhar's finest work. In 1707, shortly after *The Beaux Stratagem* was staged, Farquhar died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-nine.

### Works in Literary Context

Critics stress Farquhar's importance as a transitional figure in English literary history. He began his career during a time when Restoration drama was extremely popular, but critics of the morality embodied by these plays were also gaining prominence. Jeremy Collier's *A Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage* (1698), for instance, attacked the lax morality and sexual attitudes in Restoration drama. Scholars have noted that although Farquhar is usually identified with writers of the comedy of manners, he stands apart from them in several significant ways.

**Moving Beyond Restoration Drama** Farquhar's early comedies, *Love and a Bottle*, *The Constant Couple*, and *Sir Harry Wildair* are similar to other Restoration dramas in that they are bawdy in tone and tend to focus on sexual intrigue. They also contain intricate plots that

involve mistaken identities, multiple disguises, and trick marriages, all of which provide a sharp contrast to the simple story lines of fellow Restoration dramatists such as John Vanbrugh. In addition, the dialogue in Farquhar's plays, though lively, lacks the witty, cynical hardness of comedies of his contemporaries William Wycherley and William Congreve. While still an important trait, wit in Farquhar's plays is less apparent and is often secondary to plot and character, with comedy achieved through situation and natural plot progress rather than through daring wordplay.

Farquhar's later plays, *The Inconstant* and *The Twin Rivals*, diverge even more from the comedy of manners form, for they follow Aristotle's belief that comedies should instruct their audience by rewarding virtue, chastising vice, and laughing at weakness. *The Recruiting Officer* and *The Beaux Stratagem*, Farquhar's most celebrated plays, also reflect this new moral dimension, only their morality is less forced and more natural as a result of Farquhar's portrayal of provincial life and country manners.

Furthermore, Farquhar's characters in his later plays differ from the heartless rogues of Restoration drama in that his country maids, innkeepers, and highwaymen are genteel instead of crude and are presented in a sympathetic light. Contributing to an atmosphere of unaffected cheerfulness and freshness, their vivacity, openness, and unpredictable behavior render them more realistic than traditional character types of Restoration drama. Even Farquhar's treatment of the common Restoration theme of marital incompatibility sets him apart from his predecessors. In *The Beaux Stratagem*, for example, Farquhar resolves the couple's conflict by introducing a separation by mutual consent or divorce, a serious note that also suggests equality of the sexes.

**Legacy** Farquhar's drama is marked by its movement away from the over-the-top, overtly sexual humor of Restoration drama. He is credited with extending the range of Restoration drama by introducing country settings, manners, and characters, aspects that were later adopted and perfected by Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Sheridan. Because of his changes, one senses that Farquhar has a greater interest in the humanity of his characters and avoids simply using them as props for his humor. He analyzes characters as much as situations, just as the twentieth-century dramatist George Bernard Shaw does. In fact, pointing out that the naturalism and simplicity of Farquhar's plays are distinctly modern, Bonamy Dobree proposed that Farquhar was "the Shaw of his time."

### Works in Critical Context

Critical response to Farquhar's work has never been unanimous. In his short career, he produced several plays that received high praise, but many others went virtually unnoticed by his contemporaries. As time passed and aesthetic sensibilities changed, critics began to appreciate

the humanity of Farquhar's characters. Nonetheless, most of these early critics still felt that Farquhar's drama was best seen as a part of—not separate from—Restoration drama and judged him accordingly. It is only within the last one hundred years that Farquhar has been evaluated as a transitional figure who contributed to the evolution of drama at the end of the Restoration period.

**Pretended Impostors** Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* and *The Beaux Stratagem* were tremendously popular with contemporary audiences and have been long acknowledged as Farquhar's greatest works. Eighteenth-century critics and dramatists extolled these plays for their sentiment and humanity, proposing that Farquhar was the founder of a new and possibly superior form of comedy. Romantic critics Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, and Leigh Hunt held Farquhar in high esteem and were the first to classify him with Restoration writers, defining him in relationship to that group's achievements. Even so, Hazlitt praised Farquhar's heroes for their honesty, asserting that unlike the common Restoration rakes, "they are real gentlemen, and only pretended impostors."

**Wholesome, if Not Decent** Hunt, along with Alexander Pope, found the natural language in Farquhar's plays "wanting in an air of good breeding" and suggested that it lacked the polish and glitter of Restoration comedy. Nonetheless, Farquhar's depth of feeling, theatrical skill, and diverse characters prompted Hunt to pronounce him, in comparison with other Restoration dramatists, "upon the whole, the truest dramatic genius, and the most likely to be of lasting popularity." Critics of the Victorian era were generally hostile to the writers of Restoration drama because of its bitter satire, lascivious wit, and hedonistic values; however, these critics tended to view Farquhar favorably because he engendered greater morality in his plays. Edmund Gosse commented that "Farquhar succeeds in being always wholesome, even when he cannot persuade himself to be decent."

**Diabolical Fire** Exalting the humor of situation above that of wit and emphasizing plot above dialogue, Farquhar's comedies contributed an unsurpassed freshness, deep perception of human nature, and imaginative liveliness to the English stage of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Comparing Farquhar to other playwrights of his time, William M. Thackeray concluded in the nineteenth century that Farquhar was "something more than a mere comic tradesman: [he] has a grand drunken diabolical fire in him."

In the twentieth century, scholars discussed Farquhar's comedies independently from Restoration drama. William Archer even asserted that Farquhar rebelled against Restoration comedy. Several modern critics concur with Archer, but also blame Farquhar for adulterating the comedy of manners and ushering in sentimental comedy. They assert that his works stand between these two dramatic periods without committing to either one and

therefore come across as confused and inconsistent. John Palmer has argued that, because he "never really discovered in his art a neutral territory where the values he borrowed were reconciled with the values he contributed," Farquhar helped bring about the demise of the English comic spirit. Recent criticism is more positive, noting that Restoration drama was already in decline by the time Farquhar began writing and that he was correct to seek out a new form.

## Responses to Literature

1. One critic said that Farquhar's characters were "real gentlemen, and only pretended impostors." What do you think this critic meant when he said this? How can one be a "pretended impostor"? Support your response with examples from one or two of Farquhar's plays.
2. Describe a comedic plot in one of Farquhar's plays. Rewrite this plot for a modern audience. To understand how to do this, you might consider reading Jane Austen's *Emma* or watching the film *Clueless*, which is an adaptation of Austen's classic novel for a modern audience.
3. Read William Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, a quintessential Restoration-period drama. In what ways do you think the work of Farquhar upholds the characteristics of the Restoration-period drama that is represented in Wycherley's play? Cite specific examples from both Wycherley's play and Farquhar's work.

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## ■ Georges Feydeau

BORN: 1862, Paris, France

DIED: 1921, Rueil-Malmaison, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

*Fitting for Ladies* (1886)

*A Close Shave* (1892)

*The Lady from Maxim's* (1899)

*A Flea in Her Ear* (1907)

### Overview

Skillfully manipulating the conventions of vaudeville and farce, Georges Feydeau delighted Parisian audiences in the decades preceding World War I. Precisely staged, his plays are known for their wildly unlikely coincidences, mistaken identities, and misunderstandings. In addition, scholars find in his dramas an intellectual dimension generally absent in the works of other vaudevillian authors, and, although the farce has been replaced by other come-



Georges Feydeau Feydeau, Georges, photograph. Source unknown.

dic forms in modern theater, Feydeau's plays are still regularly performed today.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***A Literary Childhood in Paris*** Born December 8, 1862, in Paris, France, Feydeau was the son of writer and scholar Ernest Feydeau and a celebrated Polish beauty named Lodzia Selewska. The Feydeau family's wealth and position in Parisian society allowed the young Feydeau to associate with such literary figures as Theophile Gautier, Gustave Flaubert, and Jules and Edmund de Goncourt, who recorded in their diaries that he was an enchanting but lazy child. Growing up in a city that was one of the intellectual and artistic capitals of the Western world, Feydeau was exposed to the theater at a young age, and, encouraged by his father, he began to write plays before he was even ten years old.

***The Belle Époque*** The period during which Feydeau grew up and attained success was known in France as the "Belle Époque," or "Beautiful Era." This was a time notable throughout Europe for its political stability and economic prosperity. The Franco-Prussian War, the culmination of many years of hostilities between Germany and France, came to an end in 1871; the devastation of World War I would not arrive until more than forty years later. Because of this relative peace and prosperity, the Belle Époque led to a flowering of the arts, with performance arts such as plays and music enjoying a boost as audiences sought light entertainment. Feydeau's work, which was always humorous—and sometimes later dismissed as inconsequential—was perfectly suited for the French audiences of this time period.

***Comedic Monologues*** After his father died in 1873, Feydeau's mother married an eminent journalist, and the couple attempted to dissuade Feydeau from a career in the undignified world of the theater by securing for him a position in a law office. Nevertheless, Feydeau spent his evenings at the theater, and he often presented his original comic monologues at social gatherings. After the success of his first monologue, he composed five more, which were performed by many of the most well-known comedians of Parisian salon society.

***King of Vaudeville*** In 1881, Feydeau wrote his first play, *Woody and Viewed*, thus beginning a period of creativity that culminated in 1886 with the enormously popular *Fitting for Ladies*. Feydeau's acclaim was short-lived, however, as this drama was followed by seven years of critical failures with only a few mediocre successes interspersed. In the meantime, Feydeau married Marianne Carolus-Duran, the daughter of a wealthy, well-known portrait painter who helped Feydeau with the financial problems that had arisen as a result of the



playwright's succession of poorly received plays, as well as his heavy losses in the stock market.

Feydeau took a break from writing in 1890 in order to study the work of France's greatest vaudevillians, including Henri Meilhac and Alfred Hennequin. This method proved worthwhile, as Feydeau made a triumphant return to the stage in 1892 with *A Close Shave*, a production that ran for over one thousand performances and resulted in Feydeau's being proclaimed the King of Vaudeville. As his reputation spread, his plays were sometimes performed abroad in translation before premiering in France, with *A Flea in Her Ear* becoming his most popular play in English-speaking countries.

***The Road to Insanity*** Throughout his life, Feydeau was prone to depression, a condition that grew worse with age. After an unhappy, bitter marriage, Feydeau left his wife in 1909 and moved to a hotel, living there alone for ten years, surrounded by his books and paintings. In 1916, at the height of World War I (1914–1918), he divorced his wife. As the outside world was falling to pieces, his work during these years often emphasized domestic themes, especially his last five short dramas—in which wives are depicted as irrational, unyielding shrews who persecute their husbands.

As Feydeau descended from depression into syphilis-induced insanity in 1918, he grew dependent on the assistance of other writers: The first act of one play was written by Sacha Guitry; another play had to be finished by Yves Miranda; and *I Don't Cheat on My Husband*, Feydeau's last full-length play, was a collaboration with René Peter. By 1919, Feydeau was having delusions of being an emperor or an animal, and his children had him institutionalized. In an asylum in Rueil-Malmaison, France, Feydeau's state of mind deteriorated even more, and he died two years later.

### Works in Literary Context

Feydeau's influence as a playwright has been great, as his dramas have been adapted into novels and songs and continue to be staged almost one hundred years after his death. Some scholars view Feydeau as a predecessor of surrealism and the theater of the absurd; certainly, his impact is apparent in the plays of absurdist dramatists Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco. Feydeau himself looked to the great dramatists Sophocles and William Shakespeare for guidance in matters of theatrical conventions, learning, among other things, the important rule of never letting the audience feel tricked. However, the playwright was probably most inspired by Molière, France's foremost writer of farce.

***Vaudeville Variance*** Although vaudeville was one of the most popular forms of theater in Paris during the nineteenth century, Feydeau considered it predictable and stagnant, which inspired him to introduce new elements into the genre. Influenced by recent ideas of the naturalists, he gave greater dimension and believability to

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Feydeau's famous contemporaries include:

**William Butler Yeats** (1865–1939): Regarded as Ireland's greatest poet, Yeats won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923 for poetry that ranged from nationalistic to spiritual to mythological.

**Émile Loubet** (1838–1929): President of France from 1899 to 1906, Loubet was a factor in the break between the French government and the Vatican.

**W. E. B. Du Bois** (1868–1963): Du Bois was an African American social activist and writer whose *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) criticizes Booker T. Washington for being insufficiently militant concerning the rights of African Americans.

**John Millington Synge** (1871–1909): Both the comedies and tragedies by this Irish playwright offended many of his countrymen with their ironic wit, and realism, and lewdness.

**Edwin Arlington Robinson** (1869–1935): American poet Robinson introduced readers to his fictitious Tilbury Town through dramatic monologues such as "Richard Cory."

**Edmond Rostand** (1868–1918): Rostand, a French poet and dramatist, is best known for writing *Cyrano de Bergerac*, a play featuring a hero with an oversized nose.

what had previously been stylized, stock characters and convoluted, contrived plots. Additionally, he drew upon the customs and morality of his own time to update the traditional conflicts of vaudeville. In doing so, Feydeau derived humor not only from the action of his comedies, but also from both his characters' realistic faults and the social satire born from them. With comic caricatures and coordinated action, Feydeau fully developed the satiric features that distinguish his work from that of other vaudevillian writers. In *The Lady from Maxim's*, for example, much of the comedy is derived from the desire of respectable citizens to practice what they suppose to be proper social behavior, no matter how ridiculous that behavior might be.

***The Controlled Complexity of the Puzzle*** Using what is generally recognized as his greatest talent, Feydeau constructed his comedies like complex puzzles. Many critics remark that it is difficult to summarize a play by Feydeau because he interweaves several plot lines intricately so that they cannot be separated. The result is that each piece of action and every bit of dialogue are necessary for a play's final effect, which has been carefully crafted to evoke laughter. Because even the slightest change can disrupt the delicate balance of his plays,



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Feydeau's later plays present a dismal portrait of marriage based on his own marital experience. In these works, women are depicted as relentless, heartless vixens who have either resisted or totally undermined the presumed authority of their husbands. While such a view of marriage is certainly gloomy, it has been a recurring theme in literature and art. Listed below are other works that portray marriage as a source of misery:

*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), a drama by Edward Albee. After their marriage becomes a nasty battle, the cynical husband and wife in Albee's play try to humiliate each other in new ways.

*The Taming of the Shrew* (1594), a drama by William Shakespeare. Because it portrays a husband forcing and tricking his outspoken, intelligent wife into obedience to his will, feminists and other engaged readers have long challenged this well-known tale about the battle of the sexes.

"Toward Evening" (c. 100 BCE), a poem by Chinese poet Ch'u Yuan. In only four lines, the poem captures the essence of an unhappy marriage among the nobility, comparing it to a storm.

Feydeau's detailed stage directions, while reflecting his extensive knowledge of the theater, allow little flexibility for directors or actors.

### Works in Critical Context

According to a review by critic Francisque Sarcey, performances of Feydeau's *A Close Shave* had to be finished in pantomime because the actors' voices were drowned out by the thunderous laughter of the audience. Despite this kind of reception, fellow playwright Catulle Mendès predicted at the height of Feydeau's career that nobody would ever read his colleague's plays, a proclamation most likely based on Feydeau's seven-year string of failures. Although his celebrity declined in the years immediately following his death, Feydeau did not fade into obscurity as did many of his contemporaries. Instead, recent critics consider Feydeau France's greatest comic dramatist after Molière, and his work continues to be widely performed in French theaters, as well as on stages throughout the Western world. Feydeau's dramas are not only produced today, but they also are read and studied, prompting Norman R. Shapiro to call Feydeau "the [Johann Sebastian] Bach of his genre."

**A Basic Negativity** Many critics believe that close examination of Feydeau's comedies reveals a basically negative approach to life. Consistently immoral and deceitful in their actions, his characters present a cynical view of human nature, and their behavior frequently

causes pain and suffering. Feydeau's darker side is especially apparent in the one-act plays he wrote later in his career. Shorter, simpler, and less farcical than his earlier works, these plays deal with marriage, an institution portrayed as an ongoing struggle between two hopelessly incompatible people. Shapiro comments, "The playwright, like a master puppeteer, assumes a god-like role, creating around his helpless characters a universe of seeming absurdity in which their efforts to resist their destiny are frantic but fruitless," and even goes so far as to call Feydeau's theater "eminently cruel." Although some scholars claim that Feydeau was simply attempting to create a new form of comedy, most hold that the pessimistic changes in his later plays were a consequence of his personal problems.

**A Flea in Her Ear** One of Feydeau's later works, *A Flea in Her Ear*, was a success when it premiered in Paris in 1907 and has been his most popular play in both England and the United States. Peter Glenville has observed that Feydeau's dramas are "immaculately constructed" and "are largely concerned with the appetites and follies of the average human being caught in a net devised by his own foolishness." *A Flea in Her Ear* is no exception. As is the case with most farces, the play is fast-paced, and its scenes are filled with slapstick comedy. Events in *A Flea in Her Ear* take place within the context of mistaken identities and deceptions; the characters' confusion and surprise delight the members of the audience, who know all sorts of secrets that the characters do not. One particularly innovative prop that provides for great situational humor is a revolving bed that makes people instantaneously appear and disappear, an arrangement that impressed critics and audiences alike when the play opened. Because of such dramatic techniques, Shapiro notes that *A Flea in Her Ear* functions as a "rigorously, logically constructed machine" by fully developing its farcical possibilities.

### Responses to Literature

1. How did French vaudeville differ from American vaudeville? How have both vaudevilles influenced comedy in America to the present day? Name a few contemporary American comedians who draw upon vaudeville for their performances and explain what vaudevillian conventions these modern-day entertainers use.
2. Explore the political history of France from 1900 to 1945. Given France's situation during World War II, explain the rebirth of Feydeau's popularity in the early 1940s.
3. Farce is typically defined as a boisterous comedy involving ludicrous action and dialogue intended to induce laughter through exaggeration and extravagance—rather than a realistic imitation of life. Research the history of farce in the theater.

Create a time line that shows at least seven major farcical works throughout the history of theater. Make sure you include the authors' names with the name of the plays and their year of publication or performance.

4. Feydeau was prone to depression—referred to as “melancholy” in his day—most all of his life. Trace the history of the word “melancholy.” What role do you believe depression has had in the life of artists? Compare Feydeau with at least one other author, examining how their respective work was affected by the disease.

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## Henry Fielding

BORN: 1707, Sharpham, Somerset, England

DIED: 1754, Lisbon, Portugal

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, drama, essays

MAJOR WORKS:

*Tom Thumb* (1730)

*An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* (1741)

*The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and of His Friend Mr. Abraham Adams* (1742)

*The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (1749)

*Amelia* (1762)



Henry Fielding Fielding, Henry, photograph. The Library of Congress.

### Overview

The English novel as we recognize it today was shaped in large part by Henry Fielding's three major novels. But if he had never written a novel, Fielding would have a place in literary history as being for a time one of England's most popular comic playwrights. And if he had never written a play, Fielding would have a place in political history as an influential journalist and essayist. And if he had never written anything at all, Fielding would still have a place in British history as a reforming judge and the originator of London's first effective police force. It has often been said that if one could choose only one book from which to learn about England during the eighteenth century, that book should be Fielding's novel—often regarded as the first novel in English letters—*Tom Jones*.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***A Spirited Youth, Sans Parents*** Henry Fielding was born on April 22, 1707, at Sharpham Park, Somerset, the estate of his maternal grandfather. In 1710 the Fieldings moved to East Stour in Dorset. Henry's mother died when he was eleven, and he was raised by his grandmother with occasional visits to his charming but irresponsible father, Edmund Fielding. Lady Mary Wortley

Montagu, a distinguished writer and Fielding's cousin, described him about this time as a handsome and high-spirited youth, full of the joy of life, witty and humorous; very much like his most famous literary creation, Tom Jones.

**A Controversial Playwright Turns to Contestatory Law** Fielding's achievement as a novelist often overshadows his short but dynamic career as a playwright—between 1728 and 1737. Fielding ranks as one of the most popular dramatists of the eighteenth century, and if the political fallout from his satire had not brought his theatrical activities to an abrupt end, Fielding might never have made the transition from playwright to novelist.

Fielding's first play, *Love in Several Masques*, premiered in 1728, and for the next seven years Fielding was active as a playwright and theater manager. He specialized in comedies, farces, and satires, the best of which is probably *Tom Thumb* (1730). Two political satires, *Pasquin* (1736) and *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* (1737), so infuriated the government of the powerful Prime Minister Robert Walpole that all London theaters, except two protected by royal patent, were ordered closed by the Licensing Act of 1737. Fielding's career as a playwright was over, along with the theatrical careers of many others.

Fielding then turned to the study of the law. He continued to oppose the Walpole government by editing a political journal, *The Champion* (1739–1740), the first of four journals for which he wrote over his lifetime.

**The Dialectical Development of the Novel: Against Richardson** In 1740, the morally earnest novelist Samuel Richardson published *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, the story of a servant girl who preserves her virtue against the sexual advances of her aristocratic employer, who later proposes a proper marriage to her. The book was an immediate success. Fielding thought the work was the very essence of moral hypocrisy, and he could not resist spoofing this in an unsigned novella, *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* (1741). Recent critics have noted with chagrin that the success of fiction like Fielding's and Richardson's was achieved at precisely the moment of the Great Irish Famine of 1740–41. A critical consensus is emerging that the success of this new art form was related to English readers' need to distance themselves from the suffering of their neighbors in Ireland, which was at the time an English colony. While 10 percent of the Irish population was starving to death, the new novels were offering moral instruction and convulsive laughter to an ever more appreciative London readership.

Continuing the attack on Richardson, Fielding wrote a bogus sequel to *Pamela*, giving the heroine a younger brother who likewise resists the sexual advances of his aristocratic lady employer. *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews* (1742) begins with the extended joke

of the sexual double standard—female virginity being valued so much more than male chastity—but it soon outgrows its satiric origins and becomes a fully developed novel in its own right. Fielding's preface is a manifesto for the developing genre of the novel.

Fielding's law practice was not prospering, and the moderate income from *Joseph Andrews* was not sufficient to provide for his wife and children. Consequently he gathered for publication as *Miscellanies* (three volumes, 1743) some earlier works, including *The History of the Life of the Late Mr. Jonathan Wild, the Great*, a savagely ironic account of a notorious London thief whom he equated with all “great men,” Robert Walpole in particular.

Fielding's eldest daughter died in 1742, his wife in 1744, and he himself was painfully crippled with gout (an extremely painful form of arthritis). The death of his beloved wife, Charlotte, was such a shock to Fielding that his friends feared for his sanity. Yet, during these years, Fielding was creating one of the world's enduring masterpieces of good humor and convivial optimism, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749).

### **Political Journalism and Personal Scandal**

While he was writing *Tom Jones*, Fielding also edited two political journals, *The True Patriot* (1745–1746) and *The Jacobite's Journal* (1747–1748). In 1747 he married Mary Daniel, his first wife's servant, who was pregnant with his child. Fielding ignored the jeers of his enemies—their grief over Charlotte's death had drawn him and Mary together, and they had five children and a loving family for many years.

**A Magistrate Sets Sail for Lisbon** In 1748 Fielding was commissioned Justice of the Peace. Most of his work was concerned with London's criminal population of thieves, informers, and prostitutes. Fielding was assisted in his work by his blind half-brother, Sir John Fielding (1722–1780), a justice of the peace who was said to be able to recognize over three thousand criminals by their voices. The brothers organized the Bow Street Runners, the first modern police force.

Fielding's experiences as judge gave a more serious tone to his last novel, *Amelia* (1752). The sufferings of the heroine and her irresponsible husband are used to expose flaws in the civil and military institutions of the period.

Sick with jaundice, dropsy, and gout, and worn out by overwork, Fielding resigned his post as magistrate and sailed to Lisbon, Portugal, to recuperate. He made his journey the subject of his last work, *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, which was published posthumously (1755). Fielding died in Lisbon on October 8, 1754.

### **Works in Literary Context**

**Journals** The early eighteenth century was a great age for journalism and essay writing. Increasing literacy rates,

an unquenchable thirst for novelty, and a constantly contentious political climate resulted in dozens of journals and newspapers appearing seemingly overnight. Fielding produced three journals in his lifetime in the model of the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*, the influential journals of cultural commentary published by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Fielding's journals featured more politics, however, like the journals of Daniel Defoe.

***The Rise of the Novel*** Many critics consider *Tom Jones* to be the first novel in English. Novels are long fictional stories that feature ordinary people—sometimes in everyday situations and sometimes in extraordinary circumstances. The novel emerged as a popular literary genre in the eighteenth century as literacy rates rose, printing costs dropped, and the middle class swelled. A new population of readers emerged, and these people appreciated fiction with which they could identify.

***Restoration Comedy Conventions*** Fielding's comic dramas were indebted to Restoration comedy, a style popular during the period 1660–1700. Restoration comedies are marked by their urbane and witty dialogue, complex plots, satirical touches, and sexual humor. Fielding used all of these, greatly increasing the satire, often politicizing the content, and using a more coarse style of burlesque comedy.

***Reimagining the Picaresque*** For his novels, Fielding drew heavily upon the inspiration and structure of Spanish author Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605). In *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding recasts the brave, idealistic, but absentminded hero of *Don Quixote* into the figure of Parson Adams. In *Tom Jones*, Fielding borrows the now-familiar formula of the hero-with-bumbling-sidekick from *Don Quixote* and his squire Sancho Panza, recasting them as the heroic Tom and the naive country bumpkin Benjamin Partridge. Fielding also borrows the on-the-road structure of episodic adventures from *Don Quixote* known in the Spanish literary tradition as the “picaresque.” In many of these episodes, Fielding draws upon his experience as a successful comic dramatist to create scenes remarkable for their comic timing, sharply drawn characterizations, and complex interweaving of plot and subplots.

***Flawed Heroes*** Of the themes in Fielding's novels that have received most attention, the most enduring is whether *Tom Jones* is, or should be, an admirable hero despite his faults. Tom is truly in love with Sophia, but he is young and handsome, and he has a difficult time saying no to the several women who make themselves available. In one notorious case, Tom has an extended affair with Lady Bellaston, an aristocrat in London who has information about the whereabouts of Sophia. Tom accepts her money and gifts in exchange for his sexual favors. For many readers this crosses a line. Various aspects of sexuality appear in Fielding's works, including incest, sexual harassment, adultery, and the simple sexual explorations

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Fielding's famous contemporaries include:

**Ignacy Krasicki** (1735–1801): Polish poet and novelist.

Krasicki was a clergyman who wrote a hilarious mock-epic called *Monachomachia*, (1778) which ridiculed the passive lifestyle of monks. There was a huge controversy, but Krasicki responded with an equally satirical sequel.

**Mikhail Vasilyevich Lomonosov** (1711–1765): One of the most learned scholars of his time, Lomonosov was a chemist, mathematician, grammarian, and rhetorician. He made lasting contributions to the regularization of the accents and syllables in the Russian language for poetic verse.

**Immanuel Kant** (1724–1804): German philosopher who challenged the Enlightenment faith in the unlimited potential of human reason. His *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) argued that what we can know about the world comes only from the evidence of our senses.

**Voltaire** (1694–1778): French satirist, dramatist, and poet. Voltaire was a fearless satirist who kept up a relentless attack on human bigotry, ignorance, greed, and fanaticism, seen best in his most famous work, *Candide* (1759).

**James Thomson** (1700–1748): This Scottish-born poet's evocative poems about the landscape collected in *The Seasons* (1726–1730) are often seen as forerunners of the emotional nature poems of the Romantic poets, fifty years ahead of their time.

of young people who act on their emotions instead of their good judgment.

Often connected with sexuality, but not limited to it, is the theme of hypocrisy. Fielding is a powerful satirist of the hypocrisy that he sees as a growing infection in society, law, and the church. For example, in *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding creates the memorable character of Parson Adams, an elderly, absentminded, and naive Anglican minister who serves as a kind of lightning rod for hypocrisy in the many different people he encounters on the road. Despite his backwardness and childlike innocence, indeed because of it, he demonstrates by contrast the vanity and pettiness of others. Fielding's cure for hypocrisy, which Adams embodies, is in preferring good works (the Anglican value) over strong faith (the Methodist or Calvinist value). It is what you do that matters in the end, not what abstract doctrine you believe in or what kind of person others think you are; it is worth noting that the protagonists in Fielding's three major novels are a servant, an illegitimate orphan, and an ex-convict.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Fielding's *Jonathan Wild*, *Joseph Andrews*, and *Tom Jones* are influenced by the "picaresque"—a Spanish genre about the adventures of a trickster or rogue hero, traveling from place to place, getting into trouble with authority figures, and escaping by use of his cleverness and charm. Below are some works about tricksters, as well as about clashes between urban or industrial and rural or agricultural lifestyles.

*Gulliver's Travels* (1726), a novel by Jonathan Swift. Gulliver is more gullible than roguish, but he travels to several remote islands discovering little people, huge people, and talking horses. Gulliver gets himself into trouble by maintaining his English "common sense" values in places with very different assumptions and traditions—the vehicle for Swift's often bitter satire.

*Firefly* (2002), a television series created by Joss Whedon. In the twenty-sixth century, a group of smugglers—led by a former sergeant from the losing side of a galactic war—journey across the galaxy and find trouble wherever they go, but always manage to stay one step ahead of the peacekeepers, bounty hunters, and criminals trying to track them down.

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), a novel by Mark Twain. In this picaresque novel about a trip on a raft down the Mississippi River, Twain shows what is great and enduring about life in the South, but Huck also encounters all the forces of racism, corruption, and greed that mark a turn of the corner in Southern life on the eve of the Civil War.

### Works in Critical Context

Fielding's reception history is bound up in a tight knot with Samuel Richardson's reception history. The two dominant novelists of the mid-eighteenth century did not know one another personally but took several swipes at one another's work. Most significant among these swipes is probably Fielding's *Shamela* (1741), a satire on Richardson's classic novel of conduct, *Pamela* (1740). It has become a commonplace in literary criticism that the two novelists are diametrically opposed to one another, and between them one can find all the seeds of subsequent English novels: Fielding represents the external, comic, optimistic, tolerant, easygoing, panoramic, masculine, and urban aspects through his omniscient narration; whereas Richardson represents the internal, tragic, fatalistic, morally strict, anxious, focused, feminine, and domestic aspects through his first-person novels written in the form of letters. There are many themes that both novelists have in common, such as the corruption of vain aristocrats and the tyranny of self-interested parents, but it is usually the differences

between the two novelists that are emphasized to make a point. Fielding's rises in critical fashion over 250 years of criticism are usually linked to Richardson's declines, and vice versa.

**Tom Jones** *Tom Jones* was the talk of the town when it first appeared. It had the best advertisement possible: the whiff of scandal. Preachers denounced its supposed sexual immorality in their sermons, and some even blamed it for the two earthquakes that hit London in 1750. *Amelia* was also a popular success, even though it is less often read today; still, critics were so hard on Fielding for a handful of oversights in the novel that he stated in his *Covent-Garden Journal* that he would never again write fiction.

In the nineteenth century, Fielding's reputation was split: among fellow novelists his influence and popularity was high, but among the moralistic Victorian critics he found little support. William Hazlitt, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot all paid their tributes to Fielding, but the most memorable statement came from Samuel Taylor Coleridge: "What a master of composition Fielding was! Upon my word, I think the Oedipus Tyrannus, the Alchemist, and Tom Jones the three most perfect plots ever planned." (*Oedipus* is a Greek tragedy by Sophocles, and *The Alchemist* is a Renaissance comedy by Ben Jonson.)

Coleridge's comment was frequently cited by critics in the twentieth century, especially the "New Critics" of the 1940s and 1950s who gave detailed appreciations of Fielding's plotting and sense of structure. R. S. Crane's "The Plot of Tom Jones" became a classic of the movement, and Martin Battestin argued that Fielding's plots reflect the symmetrical elegance of the neoclassical architecture popular in the eighteenth century. Feminist critics starting in the 1960s found less to admire in Fielding's masculine approach and sexist characterizations. Most recently, Fielding has been blessed with a generation of responsible (and sometimes competing) biographers who have done much to erase the rumors and innuendos that had damaged his reputation over the years. In his Introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to Henry Fielding*, Claude Rawson describes Fielding as "the most important English playwright of his time" and "one of the great inaugural figures of the history of the novel." Further, Rawson observes, "Fielding's almost obsessive concern with Richardson was to develop and sharpen a mode of fiction-writing whose life and after-life continue strong."

**From Print to Film** Fielding's popularity received a major boost in 1963 when Tony Richardson's movie version of *Tom Jones* won the Academy Award for Best Picture. *Tom Jones* was later produced as a BBC mini-series in 1997, and the character of Fielding himself has appeared, along with his brother John Fielding, as a crusading judge in the British television series *City of Vice* (2008).



## Responses to Literature

1. Evaluate Fielding as a moralist in *Tom Jones*. Does the author's seeming tolerance of Tom's sexual escapades undermine or outweigh the theology and morality argued for elsewhere in the novel? Do you think Tom is a positive or negative role model, both in Fielding's time and in ours?
2. Read the preface to *Joseph Andrews* and measure Fielding's new theory of comedy with his practice in his novels. How well do they live up to Fielding's high aims?
3. Consider Fielding's powerful use of irony in *Jonathan Wild*. How many different kinds and shades of irony can you find? Does the culture of celebrity today, where even criminals are considered "great" if they are famous enough, provide a fresh perspective on Fielding's ironies?
4. In Fielding's short lifetime, he had three distinct careers: as a playwright, a novelist, and a judge. From your reading, how did his experience in each of these areas have an influence on what he achieved in the other two? Provide and analyze examples.

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## Gustave Flaubert

BORN: 1821, Rouen, France

DIED: 1880, Croisset, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

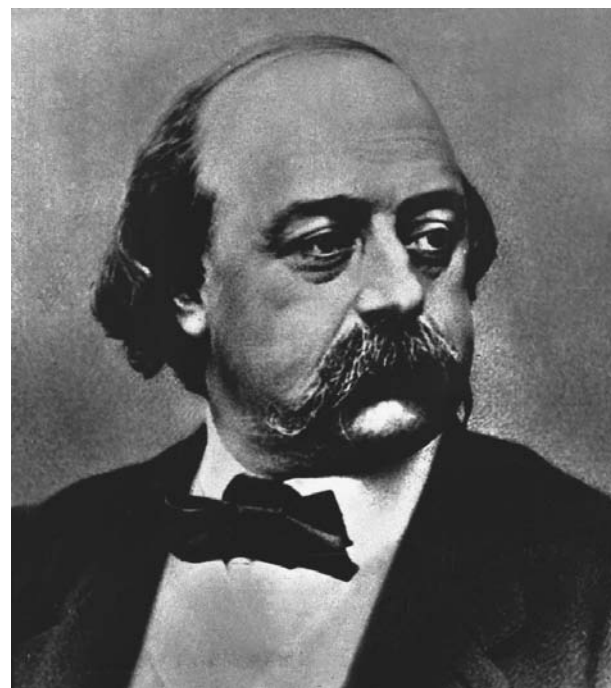
*Madame Bovary* (1857)

*Salammbô* (1863)

*Sentimental Education* (1870)

### Overview

The most influential French novelist of the nineteenth century, Flaubert is remembered primarily for the stylistic precision and dispassionate rendering of psychological detail found in his masterpiece, *Madame Bovary* (1857). Although his strict objectivity is often associated with the realist and naturalist movements, he objected to this classification, and his artistry indeed defies such easy categorization. Flaubert struggled throughout his career to overcome a romantic tendency toward fantastic imaginings and love of the exotic past. A meticulous craftsman, he aimed to achieve a prose style "as rhythmical as verse and as precise as the language of science."



Gustave Flaubert Popperfoto / Getty Images



## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

*A Tumultuous Century in French History* France during the nineteenth century was a place of frequent political turmoil and intrigue. The monarchy had only recently been removed from power during the French Revolution, in the final years of the eighteenth century. A republic was established in its place, though the country eventually came under the control of military leader Napoléon Bonaparte, who declared himself emperor and whose tyrannical and imperialist rule was in many ways not unlike the monarchy that had recently been deposed. After Napoléon was removed from power in 1815, an official monarchy was established once again, though the royal family's power was no longer absolute. This resulted in a period of relative peace during the 1830s and 1840s; however, the dissatisfaction of the working class—who for the most part were not able to vote, since they did not own property—erupted in 1848 with another revolution. Once again the vacuum of power left in the newly established republic led to a single leader with extensive powers, and once again his name was Napoléon: Louis Napoléon, nephew of the former emperor. He ruled from 1852 until 1870, when he was removed from power and yet another republic—known as the Third Republic—was established. These tumultuous times inevitably informed Flaubert's writing, most notably in his last novel, *Sentimental Education* (1870).

Gustave Flaubert was born on December 12, 1821, in Rouen, France, where his father was chief surgeon and clinical professor at the city hospital, the Hôtel Dieu, and his mother was a well-known woman from a provincial bourgeois (middle-class) family. Flaubert lived with his parents, brother Achille, and sister Caroline in an apartment at the hospital. As a youth he attended the Collège Royal de Rouen, traveled with his family throughout France, and spent summer vacations at Trouville. It was in Trouville that he first met Maria-Elisa Schlesinger, a married woman for whom he harbored a lifelong infatuation and who deeply influenced the character and direction of *Sentimental Education*. Although Flaubert was interested in literature and began to write at an early age, upon receiving his baccalaureate he honored his parents' wishes and reluctantly began law school in Paris. In 1844 his studies were disrupted when he experienced the first attack of what is now believed to have been epilepsy. As a result, he abandoned his plans for a law career and devoted himself to writing. Both his father and sister died in 1846, and the author, his mother, and his infant niece moved to the family home at Croisset, near Rouen. Except for several trips abroad and to Paris, including one to that city in 1848 to observe the February Revolution “from the point of view of art,” Flaubert remained at Croisset until his death.

*Madame Bovary* Often described as a satire on romantic beliefs and the provincial bourgeoisie, *Madame Bovary* relates the story of Emma Bovary, a bored housewife whose dreams of romantic love, primarily gathered from popular novels, are unfulfilled by her marriage to a simple country doctor. She attempts to realize her fantasies through love affairs with a local landowner and a law clerk, and later through extravagant purchases. Unable to pay her debts and unwilling to bear her disgrace or conform to bourgeois values, she commits suicide. This novel, Flaubert's first to be published despite years of writing and several completed manuscripts, initially appeared in installments in *La Revue de Paris*. Although serious critics immediately recognized in *Madame Bovary* a work of immense significance, the French government censored publication of the *Revue*. Flaubert, his printer, and his publisher were tried together for blasphemy and offending public morals. All were eventually acquitted, and both Flaubert and *Madame Bovary* acquired a certain notoriety. Flaubert came to resent the fame of *Madame Bovary*, which completely overshadowed his later works, saying he wished to buy all the copies, “throw them into the fire and never hear of the book again.”

*Later Work* After *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert sought a new subject that would be far from the bourgeois provincial setting over which he had labored so long. Once again turning to the past, he traveled to Carthage to gather material for *Salammbô* (1863), a historical novel whose exotic subject matter and opulent setting are reminiscent of the romantic tradition but whose descriptive technique is rigorously objective. In 1859, well into the writing of *Salammbô*, he wrote to Ernest Feydeau: “The deeper I plunge into antiquity, the more I feel the need to do something modern, and inside my head I'm cooking up a whole crew of characters.” Commentators agree that this “crew of characters” ultimately became the cast of *Sentimental Education*. Although not as well known or as widely read as *Madame Bovary*, *Sentimental Education* is currently regarded as one of his greatest achievements, both for its commentary on French life in the nineteenth century and for what it reveals, through its autobiographical content, about one of the greatest writers of France.

Flaubert was burdened in his last years by financial difficulties and personal sorrow resulting from the deaths of his mother and several close friends. He was also saddened by the feeling that his works were generally misunderstood. He enjoyed close friendships with many prominent contemporaries, however, including George Sand, Ivan Turgenev, Henry James, and Guy de Maupassant, the latter serving as his literary apprentice. A complex personality, obsessed with his art, Flaubert is perhaps best understood through his voluminous *Correspondence* (published 1894–1899). In these candid and spontaneous letters, Flaubert chronicles his developing literary philosophy and the meticulous research and writing of his works.

## Works in Literary Context

Flaubert's name has long been linked to realism, and *Madame Bovary* has long figured as a sacred text of literary "mimesis" (the representation of reality). Flaubert's lesser-known *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (1895) uses autobiography as both theme and inspiration to tell the story of a fourth-century Christian hermit. The novel revisits other common Flaubertian themes, including destruction and creation.

**Realism** The earliest recorded use of the term *realism* came in a Parisian periodical of 1826. Having defined it as a "literary doctrine . . . that would lead to the imitation not of artistic masterpieces but of the originals that nature offers us," the journalist added that realism "might well emerge . . . as the literature of the nineteenth century, the literature of truth." Realism was not to achieve wide currency until the 1850s, however, and then it would be used in conjunction with a certain style in painting, in particular the paintings of Gustave Courbet. Realism was rarely used without the epithet *sordid* or *vulgar*. Despite the fact that Flaubert refused to think of himself as a realist, his name has been long associated with realism. In fact, *Madame Bovary* figures often as its canonical text. In fact, Flaubert's descriptions in this novel were considered so grotesquely realistic that the government charged both the author and the publisher with immorality (though both parties were acquitted).

Flaubert believed writers must write about observed, actual facts, which relates to the devotion to science indicative of this period. In this sense, he was very much a realist. He wished the writer to be, like the scientist, objective, impartial, and impersonal. Flaubert was also a Platonist who believed in the Socratic dictum that the True, the Beautiful, and the Good are one. He was convinced that if the writer presented the true through the beautiful, his work would also be morally good.

**Social Criticism** Although Flaubert sought to depict objective reality in his works, themes of social criticism are apparent as well, with a clear reflection of specific attitudes regarding social class. In *Madame Bovary*, the ambition and vanity of Emma Bovary leads her to live beyond her means; many see this as a condemnation of the bourgeois middle class of the period, many of whom envied the life of aristocrats but still had to work for a living. Likewise, ambition becomes the downfall of Emma's husband, Charles, who is a doctor. He is convinced by a colleague to attempt a risky and unnecessary surgery that could possibly expand his reputation; the surgery is disastrous, however, and the patient loses a leg. Flaubert also depicts the complicity of merchants and moneylenders in creating an atmosphere of unhappiness through the character of Monsieur Lheureux. He convinces Emma to buy unnecessary goods on credit, which leads to a destructive cycle of debt from which she never escapes.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Flaubert's famous contemporaries include:

**Guy de Maupassant** (1850–1893): Flaubert's protégé, Maupassant is considered one of the first, and greatest, modern short-story writers. His stories often feature intricate and clever plot twists and sudden, unexpected endings.

**Harriet Tubman** (1821–1913): African American abolitionist and Union spy during the United States Civil War; Tubman rescued more than seventy slaves using a network of antislavery activists and safe houses known as the Underground Railroad. In the postwar era, Tubman struggled for women's suffrage.

**Émile Zola** (1840–1902): Zola is remembered as both an important naturalist writer and a leader in radical French politics. In 1898 Zola came to the defense of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a French army officer who had been railroaded partly on anti-Semitic grounds; Zola's essay "j'accuse" ("I accuse")—for which he was brought up on libel charges—remains one of the best examples of political agitation against institutionalized oppression.

**William Henry Vanderbilt** (1821–1885): American businessman, philanthropist, and wealthy son of Cornelius Vanderbilt. During his life, Vanderbilt was the richest man in the world as no living person, even the world's richest royalty, approached him in wealth at the time of his death.

**Ivan Turgenev** (1818–1883): In contrast to his contemporaries and fellow novelists Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Turgenev lobbied for increased westernization of Russia. His views put him at odds with many of his countrymen, and he spent much time abroad, forging a close friendship with Flaubert during his time in Paris.

**Victor Hugo** (1802–1885): A leader of the French Romantic movement, Hugo was also a poet, playwright, politician, and essayist. He is best remembered today for his novels *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*.

**Autobiography** *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* is a difficult work to describe. It could be called a philosophical prose poem or a dramatic narration and dialogue. Flaubert's identification with Anthony is at the heart of this strange work. There can be little doubt that this is a portrait of the artist himself, of an obstinate artist who resisted all self-doubt and every temptation in order to remain faithful to his self-imposed mission to his text. It also reflects the fear of decadence that haunted the nineteenth century. This was the legacy of the historical relativism of the Enlightenment related to the comparative study of religions in Flaubert's day.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Flaubert is perhaps the most well-known realist author, but he was hardly the only writer to produce classic works in that genre. Some others are:

*Germinal* (1885), a novel by Émile Zola. A writer of the naturalist school, which followed directly and built upon the tropes of realism, Zola's meticulous approach to his research and writing put even Flaubert to shame. In this, his thirteenth novel and widely acknowledged masterpiece, Zola tells the story of a French miners' strike in unrelentingly harsh and realistic terms.

*Adam Bede* (1859), a novel by George Eliot. The pen name of Mary Ann Evans, who used a male name to make sure her books would not be dismissed out of hand, Eliot was one of the most successful realist writers of the nineteenth century. This, her first published novel, tells a story of accusations of child murder set in a small rural village.

*War and Peace* (1869), a novel by Leo Tolstoy. Perhaps the best-known novel of all time, Tolstoy's first great masterpiece, which traces the fortunes of five Russian families during the Napoleonic wars, is also considered by some to be the pinnacle of realist literature.

"The Necklace" (1884), a short story by Guy de Maupassant. Maupassant was a protégé of Flaubert and took the latter's novelistic techniques and refined them to masterly usage in the short-story format. In this, the most well-known of his short stories, the author weaves a tale of middle-class aspirations and lost dreams and ends with one of his trademark twist endings.

### Works in Critical Context

Although some critics fault his pessimism, cold impersonality, and ruthless objectivity, it is universally acknowledged that Flaubert developed, through painstaking attention to detail and constant revision, an exquisite prose style that has served as a model for innumerable writers. Today, commentators consistently acknowledge Flaubert's contribution to the development of the novel, lauding *Madame Bovary* as one of the most important forces in creating the modern novel as a conscious art form. Recognized for its objective characterization, irony, narrative technique, and use of imagery and symbolism, *Madame Bovary* is almost universally hailed as Flaubert's masterpiece.

***Madame Bovary*** Perhaps because of the notoriety that *Madame Bovary* earned upon its serial publication in 1856, the book enjoyed popular success. Its charms were not entirely lost on reviewers, either, with many

popular figures—including Charles Baudelaire—commenting positively about the work. Critic Charles Augustin Saint-Beuve, writing in *Causeries du Lundi*, stated, "*Madame Bovary* is first and foremost a book, a carefully composed book, amply premeditated and totally coherent, in which nothing is left to chance and in which the author or, better, the painter does exactly what he intends to do from beginning to end." An unsigned essayist from the *Atlantic Monthly*, writing in 1891—several years after the first English translations of the novel had appeared—contended, "The truth of *Madame Bovary* has stamped its impress deeply into literature, and the word 'realism' would have to be widely diverted from its simple and spontaneous meaning to exclude such a work from its category." Harry Thurston Peck, in an 1895 essay for *Bookman*, offered this evaluation: "The vividness and truth of its every character, the compact and muscular form in which it is cast, the absolute perfection of its style, all raised it to the rank of a classic from the moment of its completion." Critical opinion of the novel has only improved in the decades that followed, and it is widely recognized as one of the greatest novels ever written. Michael Dirda, in a 2004 review for the *Washington Post*, called the book "the most controlled and beautifully articulated formal masterpiece in the history of fiction," and further stated that "if you've never read it, or if you've only worked through it in first-year college French, you need to sit down with this book as soon as possible. This is one of the summits of prose art, and not to know such a masterpiece is to live a diminished life."

Nearly fifty American editions have been issued, while there have been more than a dozen different translations into English. T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Ezra Pound all found in Flaubert a master from whom a lesson in writing could be learned. Pound unabashedly proposed Flaubert to his compatriots as an example to be appreciated and followed: "America needs a Flaubert to generalize and register the national folly without a tender hand." Joyce is said to have read everything by Flaubert that was in print and to have learned whole pages by heart.

***Sentimental Education*** Flaubert encountered more critical woes with the publication of his novel *Sentimental Education*. During the writing process, he was tormented by doubts about the book. While he intended to sketch bourgeois characters, he scorned the bourgeoisie and feared his readers would too. He also doubted his ability to depict the characters effectively. Flaubert's many misgivings about *Sentimental Education* were realized immediately after the work's publication. Critics derided the book: They accused him, as they had with *Madame Bovary*, of baseness and vulgarity; questioned his morality; attacked the novel's descriptive passages as tedious and redundant; deplored the absence of a strong hero; labeled the narrative awkward and disjointed; resented Flaubert's exposure of illusions held dear about the political events of 1848; and even claimed that

Flaubert had lost forever what literary skills he may have once possessed. The reviews were so negative, in fact, that Flaubert suspected he was the victim of a plot to defame him. Yet modern scholars generally agree that the explanation is much simpler: Most readers were not ready for what appeared to them to be a novel in which subject, plot, and character were merely background features, and few could easily bear its despairing tone and bleak atmosphere.

## Responses to Literature

1. Gustave Flaubert has been called the master of "Art for Art's Sake." Research the literary school of realism and the idea of "art for art's sake" and discuss Flaubert's work in those terms.
2. Flaubert, it is said, was attempting to write realistically, to report what he saw, and to write with the beautiful precision of the language of science. Discuss how a work of literature can be said to resemble, in style, tone, rhythm, or diction, a piece of music or a work of science.
3. Read *Madame Bovary* and discuss the various parallels between that novel and the short story "A Simple Heart." In particular, examine the similarities and differences in the worldviews expressed in the two works.
4. Discuss the reaction to *Madame Bovary* at the time of its publication and how critical opinion has changed over time. What does this tell you about the changes in society from the time of its publication onward?
5. Investigate the lives of the French middle class during the nineteenth century. How strict was their class system? What moral standards did they follow?

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## Ian Fleming

BORN: 1908, London, England

DIED: 1964, Canterbury, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Casino Royale* (1953)

*From Russia with Love* (1957)

*Doctor No* (1958)

*Goldfinger* (1959)

*Chitty Chitty Bang Bang: The Magical Car* (1964)

## Overview

Ian Fleming is best known as the creator of James Bond (Agent 007), a character that spurred the development of the spy-thriller genre in fiction. He was also, however, a journalist, financier, and collector of rare books, who during World War II served as the aide to the British director of naval intelligence.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Father Killed in Action** Ian Lancaster Fleming was born on May 28, 1908, in the Mayfair district of London.



Ian Fleming Fleming, Ian, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

He was the second son of Valentine Fleming and Evelyn Beatrice Ste. Croix Rose. Fleming's father was a wealthy investment banker in the firm of Robert Fleming and Company, which had been founded by Fleming's grandfather. When Fleming was nine years old, his father was killed in action in World War I.

By Valentine Fleming's will, Evelyn Fleming was given control of the income from her husband's fortune as long as she lived and did not remarry. For Fleming, this stipulation meant that he would receive no money from his father's estate unless his mother agreed, and this arrangement would continue even after Fleming reached adulthood. He was, therefore, obliged to conform to her wishes until he was able to achieve financial independence.

**Tumultuous School Days** Fleming began his education in 1916 at Durnford School on the Isle of Purbeck. The cult of physical toughness received greater emphasis at Durnford than did academic studies, reinforcing Fleming's lack of interest in scholarly pursuits. Fleming's lackluster academic career continued after he went on to Eton in 1921. There, despite a stellar performance in individual sporting events, he had difficulty in yielding to authority and refused to follow the rules set by his housemaster. In 1926, disappointed with his poor academic performance, his mother removed him from Eton so that he could prepare at a special tutorial college for the entrance examination at the Royal Military College

(now the Royal Military Academy) at Sandhurst in preparation for a career as an officer in the army.

Fleming never adjusted to the requirements of military discipline, and his habit of leaving the grounds without permission to meet women in town did not bode well for a career in the military. He contracted gonorrhea before completing his training course and left school to recuperate. Pressured by his mother, who feared that the truth of his illness would come out and bring shame to the family, he submitted his resignation to become effective September 1, 1927. After leaving Sandhurst he attended Tennerhof, an experimental private school in the Austrian Alps. There he read widely, traveled around Europe, studied languages, took up skiing and mountaineering, and continued his active pursuit of amorous adventures.

**A Foray into Journalism** Fleming also spent some of his time preparing for the Foreign Office examination, which he took in 1931. He ranked twenty-fifth of the sixty-two who sat for the rigorous examination, not nearly high enough for any of the three positions available. Through his mother's influence he obtained an interview with Sir Roderick Jones of the Reuters news agency. Fleming impressed Jones with his language abilities, wide-ranging knowledge, and manner, and Jones hired him on a trial basis at a salary of 300 pounds per year. Fleming reluctantly moved in with his mother at her Chelsea home until he could make enough money to live on his own.

Fleming did well at Reuters, and after more than a year of routine editing and reporting, he was sent to Moscow in April 1933 to cover the trial of six British engineers working in the Soviet Union who were being tried for sabotage, espionage, and bribery. Fleming knew enough Russian to communicate effectively with Moscow residents, and he was excited by the trial. He set up elaborate preparations to scoop the opposition when the verdict came in but was beaten out by twenty minutes.

**A Career in Finance** When Fleming returned to England, Reuters offered him a position as assistant to the bureau chief in Shanghai at an annual salary of eight hundred pounds. Although it was a significant increase and he liked the excitement of the life of a foreign correspondent, he needed still more money to live in the style he enjoyed. When his grandfather Robert Fleming had died earlier that year, Fleming had not been provided for in the will. Fleming decided to follow his mother's advice to seek a more lucrative career in the London financial world. Through the combined influence of his mother and his mistress, Maud Russell, he found a position with Cull and Company, a merchant banking firm. Fleming hoped to be made partner of the firm when Maud's husband, Gilbert, retired, but two years later, Gilbert Russell postponed retirement indefinitely. In June 1935, Fleming moved to the brokerage firm Rowe and Pitman



as a junior partner with an income that promised to be more than two thousand pounds a year.

In early 1937, Fleming moved out of his mother's Chelsea home and into an unusual flat in a converted Baptist chapel constructed in 1830. He began to entertain frequently, particularly a group of friends to which he gave the title *Le Cercle gastronomique et des jeux de hasard*. He also began to collect books, encasing them in expensive black boxes with which he lined the windowless walls of the converted nave that served as his living room.

**Goldeneye** With the outbreak of World War II, Fleming obtained a position in the naval intelligence division, rising to the rank of commander in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, the rank that he eventually assigned to James Bond. The life that he lived and some of the people he met during the war would find their way into his novels. For example, Fleming once attempted to take the money of some German agents in a card game just as Bond did with Le Chiffre in *Casino Royale*; where Fleming failed, however, Bond succeeded. When in 1941 Fleming accompanied Admiral John Godfrey, the director of naval intelligence, to the United States to establish relations with American intelligence services, he was allowed to take part in a clandestine operation against a Japanese cipher expert. Fleming later embellished this story as well and used it in *Casino Royale*. Critics have been tempted to see Bond as the personification of his creator. They do have certain interests in common, such as gambling, sports, and cars, but Fleming maintained that Bond is simply the incarnation of his own adolescent fantasies.

Among the places Fleming visited during the war was Jamaica, and at the end of the war he purchased shoreline property there, built a house, and named the estate "Goldeneye." Although Fleming returned to journalism after the war, serving as foreign manager of the Kelmsley group of newspapers, it was at Goldeneye that he began to work on the James Bond novels. It was these works that finally gave him the financial independence he had so long desired.

**James Bond and Other Successes** Using his experience with British intelligence as a basis, Fleming began turning out spy novels featuring secret agent 007, James Bond. Although not an immediate hit in America, sales of the books took off after President John F. Kennedy put *From Russia with Love* on a list of his favorite books.

Between 1953 and 1966, Fleming wrote a total of fourteen Bond books, all of which would eventually be made into film adaptations. Film rights to all published and future Bond books were sold in 1961; *Dr. No*, the first Bond film, premiered in 1962. Not expected to do particularly well, the first Bond film was an instant smash hit and kicked off a "spy craze" that would permeate popular culture for the remainder of the decade.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Fleming's famous contemporaries include:

**John F. Kennedy** (1917–1963): Charismatic American president whose brief term coincided with such important events as the Cuban missile crisis, the building of the Berlin Wall, and the beginnings of the space race and the civil rights movement. His assassination in 1963 has been observed to mark the end of an era in American politics and society.

**T. S. Eliot** (1888–1965): One of the greatest poets of the twentieth century and an influence on its poetry as a critic and publisher, his long modernist poem "The Waste Land" became a rallying cry for the disillusionment felt by many young people after the First World War.

**Sean Connery** (1930–): The first actor to portray James Bond on the movie screen, the respected Scottish actor was knighted in July 2000 in recognition of his long and successful movie career.

**Kingsley Amis** (1922–1995): A prominent British novelist in the years after World War II, he was one of a group of writers known as Britain's "angry young men." After Fleming's death, he published a James Bond novel *Colonel Sun* (1968) as well as a study *The James Bond Dossier* (1965).

Fleming also wrote the popular children's book *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, which was made into a live-action Disney movie, and a nonfiction book on diamond smugglers. Fleming died on August 12, 1964. Although the official cause was a heart attack, he had been a heavy smoker and drinker throughout his life and had long been in poor health.

## Works in Literary Context

**The Spy Thriller** The genre that would come to be known as the spy thriller began with the twentieth century. Books like *Kim* (1901) by Rudyard Kipling and *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1905) by Baroness Orczy delved into the exploits of undercover agents. Several Sherlock Holmes stories follow the pattern of spy stories more closely than detective stories as well.

With the coming of World War II, the first "authentic" spy novels, often written by retired intelligence officers such as W. Somerset Maugham, began to appear. But it would take the cold war between Soviet Russia and the United States to truly ignite public interest in the genre.

The 1960s were the high point for the spy genre, as it spread beyond books into movies and television. For



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Ian Fleming's Bond books virtually defined the modern spy novel; here are some other worthy representatives of the genre:

*The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1963), a novel by John Le Carré. Voted the best spy novel of all time by *Publisher's Weekly*, this tightly plotted novel depicts "the good guys" in a distinctly cynical light.

*Kim* (1901), a novel by Rudyard Kipling. Set among the intricate moves and countermoves of the Great Game, the political conflict between Britain and Russia in central Asia during the nineteenth century.

*Ashenden* (1928), a novel by W. Somerset Maugham. Based on the author's experiences serving with British intelligence during World War I, this is often credited as being the first true espionage novel.

many, the Bond books and movies remain the definitive benchmarks of the genre.

**Influence** The formula of the Bond novels gave birth to a whole genre, the spy thriller, which has been imitated ad nauseum ever since. Many spy novels are actually "anti-Bonds," in which the heroes display a rather loose view of morality and a cynical worldview; the novels of John Le Carré were an early example of this. Later writers such as Robert Ludlum and Tom Clancy honed and perfected the spy thriller.

### Works in Critical Context

Critical response to Fleming's books has varied. Some reviewers have commended Fleming's ability to build suspense and his sense of place and atmosphere; others have castigated him as a purveyor of bad fiction and an offensive code of moral principles. In a 1958 attack on Fleming's work, Bernard Bergonzi criticized the Bond adventures as morally destructive. Paul Johnson focused this attack when he called *Doctor No* the "nastiest book" he had ever read, and then went on to denounce Bond and his creator for excessive displays of "sex, sadism, and snobbery." Christine Bold has written that "it is no secret that Fleming's fiction ritually works to objectify and infantilise its 'girls,' as these sexually mature women are routinely named." Kingsley Amis's book *The James Bond Dossier* is an extended defense of Fleming and a laudatory examination of his works. The Bond books have also been analyzed as modern treatments of ancient myths and legends. Despite this attention from critics, Fleming insisted that his intent was not to write literature, but to keep the reader turning the page.

**Casino Royale** The first James Bond novel, *Casino Royale*, was published in 1953 to largely agreeable

reviews and sales. Anthony Boucher, in a review for the *New York Times*, saw promise in certain passages but not in the clichéd plot, concluding, "You should certainly begin this book; but you might as well stop when the baccarat game is over." In 2006, with a new film adaptation of the book just released in theaters, Nicholas Lezard of the *Guardian* recommended the book to modern readers, both for its glimpse at English society just after World War II and because the book, like all of Bond's adventures, is "enormous fun."

### Responses to Literature

1. Select a James Bond novel and movie. How do the two compare? How different is the literary James Bond from his cinematic alter ego? Does the difference seem more pronounced if the movie was made many years after the book's publishing date?
2. What conventions of the spy thriller did the Bond books create?
3. The success of the James Bond novels is owed in large part to being written at a time when American readers were particularly receptive to spy stories. What was going on in America and abroad at the beginning of the 1960s that would have made tales of espionage so popular? Why do you think there was a "spy craze"?

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## Dario Fo

BORN: 1926, San Giano, Lombardy, Italy

NATIONALITY: Italian

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

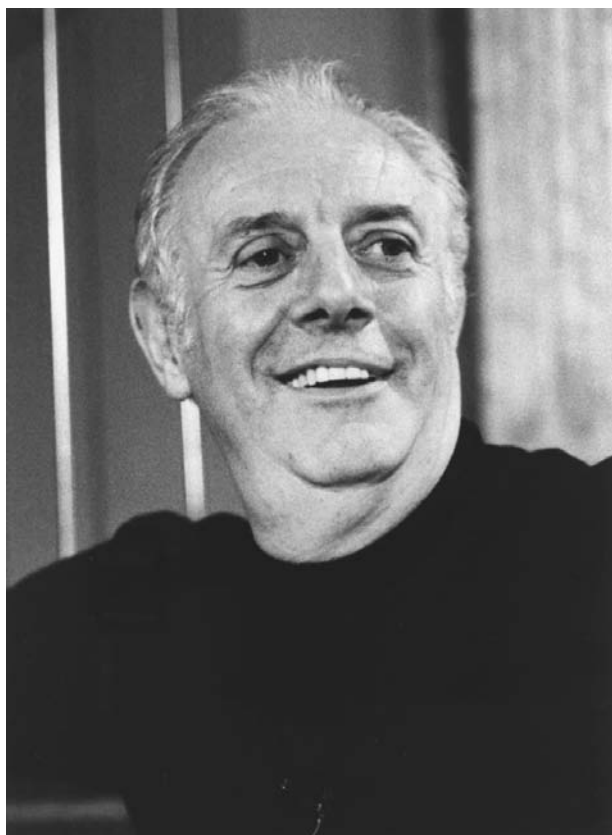
*Archangels Don't Play Pinball* (1959)

*He Who Steals Foot Is Lucky in Love* (1961)

*It's Always the Devil's Fault* (1965)

*Comic Mystery* (1969)

*Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (1970)



Dario Fo Fo, Dario, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

## Overview

For more than fifty years, Italian playwright Dario Fo has been a central figure in theater. His preoccupation has always been to question and denounce the injustices imposed on human beings around the world, and although his theater has used comedy to expose the corruption, dishonesty, and arrogance of the powerful, he has always provoked serious reactions throughout the world. Fo's ideological stance has always been accompanied by a personal commitment, beyond the theater, to help and support those who suffer.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***Creativity in Family Tree*** Fo was born in San Giano, Italy, on March 24, 1926. His father, Felice, was a railway stationmaster and a socialist, while his mother, Pina Rota, was an educated woman of peasant origin and tradition. Fo's parents were not insensitive to the appeal of art and culture. His father was an amateur actor, and his mother had written a critically acclaimed autobiographical book, *The Nation of Frogs* (1970). Fo's grandfather, Giuseppe Rota, was a natural-born storyteller

and was also important to the boy's development as a performer and playwright. In an early interview, Fo traced his own talent for theater and literature to this grandparent.

***Interrupted Schooling*** In 1940, Fo enrolled at the Accademia d'Arte di Brera to study architecture, but was unable to attend his courses because of the outbreak of World War II. The war in Europe began because of the territorial ambitions of Nazi leader Adolf Hitler. Germany, which had been heavily penalized after losing World War I, sought to regain its stature and invested heavily in its military in the early 1930s. After Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Great Britain declared war on Germany. France, and later the United States, allied with Britain, to form the Allied Powers while Italy, among others, including Japan and various central and eastern European powers, allied with Germany to form the Axis Powers.

Italy was ruled by its own fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini, for much of the war. However, defeats in Greece and North Africa and the invasion of Sicily by the United States and its allies, led to the end of Mussolini's regime in July 1943. Italy was soon divided into two warring zones. One was in the south and controlled by the Allies, while the north, including Rome, was controlled by the Germans, who formed the Italian Social Republic with Mussolini as its head. German power eventually collapsed, and the Axis Powers lost the war. Mussolini was later executed for his role in the conflict.

This period is nonetheless important, because Fo befriended intellectuals who later dominated the landscape of Italian culture in the 1960s and 1970s. These friends included Carlo Lizzani, Elio Vittorini, Carlo Bo, and Gillo Pontecorvo. His family took an active part in the antifascist resistance, and Fo helped his father to smuggle refugees and Allied soldiers to Switzerland, while his mother cared for wounded partisans. After Italy was divided in 1943, Fo was conscripted into the army of the Italian Social Republic. He managed to escape, however, and hid until the end of the war.

***Theatrical Beginnings*** After the war, Fo continued his studies in Milan at the faculty of architecture of the Politecnico. He never completed his curriculum for graduation, but he got a part-time job as an assistant architect and began to draw theater scenes and to exhibit his paintings and drawings. He also began to frequent the Milan theatrical scene, where his encounter with the actor and theater manager Franco Parenti turned out to be decisive for his future career. Fo became involved in the "small theatre" (community theater) movement, where he performed improvised monologues. In 1950, he started to work for a theater company led by Parenti. In 1951, Fo performed "Poor Little Thing," a series of satirical monologues, as part of the revue *Seven Days in Milan* at the Teatro Odeon in Milan. It was his first

experience in an “official” theater. Parenti also introduced Fo into the Italian State Broadcasting Company, RAI, where Fo performed his monologues on the radio program *Chicchirichi* that year.

In 1953 and 1954, working in collaboration with Parenti and Giustino Durano, Fo was the author and actor of the shows *A Finger in the Eye* (1953) and *Fit to Be Tied Up* (1954), which were staged at the Piccolo Teatro of Milan. Both shows experienced censorship interference due to their anti-government content.

**Brief Foray into Film** In 1955, Fo and his wife, Franca Rame, worked in movie production in Rome. Fo became a screenwriter and worked on many productions, having signed a contract with the Dino de Laurentiis Film Company. In 1956, he was the coauthor and lead actor of *The Duffer*. The film was a commercial failure.

In 1959, the Company Fo-Rame was established, and for the next nine years opened each theater season at the Odeon in Milan with a new play or show. In addition to taking part in her husband’s comedies, Rame took charge of the administrative responsibilities of the company, while Fo focused more on playwriting and acting.

**Finding a Dramatic Voice** Fo’s activity as a dramatist had begun in the 1950s, when he wrote seven farces that were collected and performed later under the titles *Thieves, Dummies and Naked Women* (1958) and *Final Gag* (1958). He wrote his first three “regular” plays between 1959 and 1961: *Archangels Don’t Play Pinball* (1959), *He Had Two Pistols with White and Black Eyes* (1960), and *He Who Steals a Foot Is Lucky in Love* (1961). These early plays represent Fo’s willingness to find a personal and original voice in the theatrical panorama of Italian playwriting of the 1960s.

As Fo began finding his dramatic voice, Italy was recovering from the effects of World War II. When the war ended, Italy was poverty-stricken and politically fragmented. Reconstituted as a republic in 1946, the country soon adopted a new constitution, though it nearly collapsed because of the physical and economic devastation of the war. After receiving foreign assistance in the early 1950s, Italy rebounded economically and experienced unprecedented development through the 1950s and 1960s.

**Political Revolution and ARCI** In Europe throughout the early twentieth century, many intellectuals and artists embraced communism and a viable, desirable alternative to the nationalistic totalitarian regimes of the past. The growing political dominance of the Soviet Union in eastern Europe after World War II caused many to reconsider their connection to the communist party. In Italy, many members and supporters of the Italian Communist Party abandoned the organization. Fo had never become a member of the Italian Communist Party, while Rame did, but regarded the

group with the utmost interest and believed that the needs of the working class were best met through communism. For this reason, he decided to cooperate with ARCI (the Communist Party association for recreation and culture, with a membership of about one million). After dissolving the Company Fo-Rame, he founded the Company New Scene. The new company toured Italy and other countries to stage their works in places that reflected their social engagement, such as circuses, squares, culture clubs, university assembly halls, and factories occupied by striking workers.

**Attacking America** During this period, Fo staged two new plays, *Throw the Lady Out* (1967) and *Grand Pantomime with Flags and Small, Middle-Sized and Large Puppets* (1968). Both plays are satires set in circuses, and both attack the United States for its capitalist, consumerist culture and its involvement in the Vietnam War. Comments made in the play about President John F. Kennedy’s assassination were considered so outrageous, especially in the United States, that President Lyndon Johnson and American authorities denied Fo a visa to enter the country. This prohibition remained in effect until 1986.

**Fo’s Masterpiece** The year 1969 was a crucial year for Fo’s art and career. He completed the first version of *Comic Mystery*, widely considered his masterpiece. The play drew criticism, however, on grounds of supposed irreverence and blasphemy.

A dramatic incident at the end of 1969 marked Fo both personally and artistically. A bomb killed nineteen people in a bank in Piazza Fontana, Milan. This brutal, anonymous attack started what became known as “the season of bombs,” a period of increased violence, killings, and bomb attacks in Italy. Fo believed high-ranking members of the government were behind the attacks. In 1970, he staged *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, inspired by the Piazza Fontana incident and centering on the death of the anarchist Pino Pinelli at the police headquarters of Milan in 1969.

**A New Play in a New Theater** In 1973, Fo, Rame, and the members of their theater company occupied an old abandoned building in Milan called Palazzina Liberty. After completely restoring it, including its theater, they opened the new structure in 1974 with *We Can’t Pay? We Won’t Pay!* This play, about a tax protest by housewives, features one of Fo’s most famous gags: two women steal regularly from a supermarket, concealing items under their overcoats as if they were pregnant.

**Woman’s Work** The works that followed had contemporary value: *Fanfani Kidnapped* (1975) was written against the background of the political election that year, and *Mother’s Marijuana Is the Best* (1976) deals with the increasing problem of drug use among young working-class Italians. Toward the end of the 1970s, Fo wrote for and with Rame a series of one-act plays and monologues

about the female condition, including *All House, Bed and Church* (1977). This series of one-act plays was highly successful, even though Rame stated on opening night that perhaps the only flaw of the work was that Fo wrote most of it, and, his being “unequivocally a man” he was “unable to penetrate the contradictions, humiliations and harassments to which we [women] are subject.” Notwithstanding this flaw, the play series was staged all over Europe, Canada, and the United States.

As the cooperation in playwriting with Rame had been so fruitful, Fo continued the experience, producing more monologues for actors. In 1978, Fo completed the third version of *Comic Mystery*. He also rewrote and directed *Story of a Soldier*, based on Igor Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* (1918).

***The Moro Affair Letters*** Fo could not avoid being interested in the Moro Affair, probably the most shocking political crime in the history of the Italian Republic. In March 1978, a commando of the Red Brigades (a clandestine revolutionary Communist organization) kidnapped Aldo Moro, premier and leader of the Christian Democratic Party. *The Tragedy of Aldo Moro*, published in the periodical *Quotidiano dei lavoratori* in June 1979, is an intensely dramatic work, based on the letters Moro wrote from the place where he was kept. In spite of the interest of the theme and the considerable artistic value of the text, the play has never been performed publicly.

***American Ban Lifted*** American authorities suspended their ban on Fo's entry into the country in 1984. Two years later he toured the United States, presenting his works and lecturing in many theaters and universities.

After *The Pope and the Witch* (1989)—a harsh criticism of the authorities managing the centers for drug addiction, prevention, and care—Fo turned to the issue of AIDS with *Quiet! We Are All Falling!* in 1990. He wrote *Johan Padan and the Discovery of the Americas* (1990), then turned to the sixteenth century to write an adaptation on the works of an anticlassist in *Dario Fo Recites Ruzzante* (1993). In 1993, Fo also wrote *Mama! The Sans-Culottes!*, a metaphorical play that is based on an actual event, an attempted coup d'état in Italy by the military supported by sections of the Secret Service. Beginning with this play, Fo became more interested in problems regarding the Italian justice system, focusing particularly on the pressures exerted against judges who only wish to do their duty.

***Illness and Recovery*** On July 17, 1995, Fo was disabled and almost lost his sight because of an attack of cerebral ischemia (decreased supply of blood to the brain, often caused by blockage or obstruction of supplying blood vessels). He recovered within a year and returned to the stage in 1996 with *The Emperor's Bible, the Peasants' Bible*, derived, as the author has stated, from an “illuminated codex of the ninth century.” He also revis-

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Fo's famous contemporaries include:

**Don Arden** (1926–2007): The English music manager who represented such artists and groups as Black Sabbath, Electric Light Orchestra (ELO), and Small Faces.

**César Chávez** (1927–1993): The Mexican American farmworker who was also an activist and civil rights leader. He cofounded the National Farm Workers Association.

**Robert Bly** (1926–): An American poet and activist. He founded the Mythopoetic Men's Movement. Bly's books include *Iron John: A Book about Men* (1990).

**Hugh Hefner** (1926–): An American entrepreneur who is the famous founder of Playboy Enterprises.

**Todd Matshikiza** (1921–1968): A South African jazz pianist, composer, and activist who was instrumental in apartheid resistance efforts and who was subsequently exiled by the South African government. His works include the choral piece *Makhapiphile* (1953).

ited corruption with his play *The Devil with Tits* (1997). Also in 1997, Fo was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, causing an uproar in some intellectual circles in Italy. Aside from the controversial nature of many of his plays, opponents felt that his work was mere clowning and did not have the literary merit to deserve the prize. Fo, delighted by the uproar, turned his Nobel lecture into another performance. With the money from the prize, Fo and Rame founded The Nobel for the Disabled, an organization dedicated to assisting the handicapped.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Fo presented several more themes of personal and public interest—including works on justice and *The Holy Jester Francis* (1999), which suggested St. Francis of Assisi was the first jester ever known. In 2007, Fo published his memoirs, *My First Seven Years (Plus a Few More)*. The book shares his childhood in Italy and reiterates the greatest influences on his art. He continues to live in Italy and produce original works.

### Works in Literary Context

Influenced by his paternal grandfather's story-telling ability as well as his own passion for current events, Fo's themes are typically those that interest him personally and the contemporary society as a whole. The themes preferred by Fo, especially in later years, have been those that, above all, address the issues of injustice and discrimination in the world.

***Comic Style for Serious Themes*** Fo has always perceived himself as a modern jester, one who has assigned

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also written on themes of social injustice:

*Freedom Songs* (1991), a novel by Yvette Moore. In this novel for young adults, the author explores the life of one family living in the early 1960s and the impact of the civil rights movement on their lives.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), a novel by Harper Lee. In this novel, human dignity is nearly destroyed but restored when the humanitarian lawyer Atticus Finch goes to court.

*Maus* (1977), a graphic novel by Art Spiegelman. In this unusual but provocative format for the story of the Holocaust, the Jewish people are portrayed as mice and the Nazis are depicted as cats.

*The U.S.A. Trilogy* (1938), three novels by John Dos Passos. In this collection of three novels, the author uses innovative literary techniques to explore the development of America in the early twentieth century. The books examine such issues as the treatment of immigrants, urban blight, and the rise of unions.

himself the task of denouncing—by means of jokes and mockery—what he finds wrong with society. Some of his most serious themes are treated in comic fashion by his using grotesque comedy or presenting in farce.

*Quiet! We Are All Falling!* can be defined as a grotesque situation comedy—in which a concoction of themes is dealt with in a way that enhances the monstrous features of power—even if people have become accustomed to them to a point that they have become unaware of their true nature. *Grand Pantomime with Flags and Small, Middle-Sized and Large Puppets* (1968) is a popular farce that starts to explore fascism and evolves into political slurs against the bourgeoisie (middle class), the military, and the Catholic hierarchy. *He Had Two Pistols* is farce, and at the same time it tends to evoke more the tones and atmospheres of dark or black comedy.

### Works in Critical Context

Fo's comedies have met with government censorship. Yet, many have also been received by the general public and by entertainment and literary critics with much respect and praise. His farce *A Finger in the Eye* was a critical and commercial success. *Fit to Be Tied Up* was frequently sold out. Other plays have not fared as well, such as *He Who Steals a Foot Is Lucky in Love* and *It's Always the Devil's Fault*.

***He Who Steals a Foot Is Lucky in Love*** In *He Who Steals a Foot* the myth of Apollo and Daphne is revisited,

yet deprived of any classical dignity. It is cast in a farcical light that stresses the popular and possibly vulgar developments of the theme. This event triggers a freewheeling succession of misunderstandings, gags, and misrepresentations. Paolo Puppa, in his *Dario Fo's Theater: From the Stage to the Piazza* (1978), regarded this comedy as the “most bookish” of Fo's plays.

***It's Always the Devil's Fault*** In the 1965 *It's Always the Devil's Fault*, Fo relies largely on quick-changing disguises and fast rhythm. The action develops without any delays until the farcical ending, when the play's heretics rebel, claiming their long-denied rights. This play did not receive positive reviews from the critics. As Piero Novelli wrote in *Gazzetta del Popolo*, it was so overloaded with gags and scene changes that it created genuine confusion on stage.

### Responses to Literature

1. Using your library and the Internet, research the elements of farce, grotesque comedy, and black comedy. How do Fo's plays fit these categories?
2. While reading Fo's plays, mark or highlight sections you think might be offensive to certain groups of people. Do you think Fo intended to be offensive? What purposes might giving offense serve?
3. Those interested in the social and political history of Europe following World War II should read *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (2006), by Tony Judt. Judt, an academic historian, provides a highly readable and carefully researched portrait of the birth of modern Europe.

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## Ken Follett

BORN: 1949, Cardiff, Wales

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Eye of the Needle* (1978)

*The Man from St. Petersburg* (1982)

*Lie Down with Lions* (1985)

*The Pillars of the Earth* (1989)

*World Without End* (2007)

### Overview

Ken Follett began his career as a fiction writer while working for the *London Evening News*. He produced a series of mysteries and thrillers (two for children) under various pseudonyms until he felt he had learned enough and had written well enough to author under his own name. Since that time, Follett has become one of the world's youngest millionaire authors, making his fortune writing international thrillers that blend historical events and action-adventure fiction. After the success of his first best seller, *Eye of the Needle*, each of Follett's subsequent novels has debuted with massive first printings and vast publicity. His works strike a balance between the serious and the popular and have been praised for their psychological complexity as well as the sensitive treatment Follett gives his female characters.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Early Work: Journalism and Rock and Roll** Born in Cardiff, Wales, on June 5, 1949, the son of Martin and Lavinia Follett (the former an internal revenue clerk), Kenneth Martin Follett attended University College in London, where he received a bachelor of arts degree in philosophy in 1970. While still at university, on January 5, 1968, he married Mary Emma Ruth Elson, who worked as a bookkeeper to help put Follett through school. The Folletts have a son, Emanuele, and a daughter, Marie-Claire.



Ken Follett TORSTEN SILZ / AFP / Getty Images

Follett began his career in journalism as rock music columnist for the *South Wales Echo* from 1970 to 1973. Then he became a crime reporter for the *London Evening News* from 1973 to 1974, an editorial director for Everest Books Ltd., London, from 1974 to 1976, and deputy managing director for the same company from 1976 to 1977. In the late 1970s, he became involved politically in the activities of Britain's Labour Party, and in the process met the former Barbara Broer, a Labour official, who became his second wife in 1985. More than a decade later, she became an elected Member of Parliament.

**Early Success: Writing for the Masses** Follett's ideal, set forth in his 1979 essay "Books that Enchant and Delight," is a compromise between the serious and the popular, the "plot, story, excitement sensation, and the world outside the mind" that he believes serious writers too often ignore, merged with the "graceful, powerful prose" and more complex character development that mass-market writers fail to take time for.

His first novel, *The Big Needle*, published in 1974, was quickly turned out under the pseudonym Simon Myles to pay car repair bills after the birth of his daughter



## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Follett's famous contemporaries include:

**Neil Armstrong** (1930–): American astronaut, professor, test pilot, and naval aviator. The first person to set foot on the moon.

**Simon Cowell** (1959–): Emmy-nominated artist and repertoire ("A & R") mogul who has produced top-selling artists around the world. Talent judge on blockbuster television series *American Idol* since 2002.

**Wilma Rudolph** (1940–1994): 1960 Summer Olympian who became the first American woman to win three gold medals in a single Olympic season.

**John Updike** (1932–): Award-winning American writer of small town, Protestant, white middle-class subjects who has twice won the Pulitzer Prize.

**Oprah Winfrey** (1954–): Award-winning actress, talk-show host, and philanthropist who ranks highest in such categories as the only African American billionaire (2001–2003) and most philanthropic African American of all time (2004).

Marie-Claire in 1973. It reflects its origins: sensationalist, racy, and short, with an exciting chase scene that has since become the hallmark of a Follett novel.

**Breakthrough Novels** Follett's big break came in 1978. The highly acclaimed *Eye of the Needle*, a Literary Guild selection and winner of the 1978 Edgar Award from the Mystery Writers of America, was in fact—thanks to a carefully conducted marketing campaign—on the best-seller list weeks before its actual publication. Follett's motivation remained monetary: having attended a sales conference held by Futura Publications, distributors of Everest Books, Follett was asked by Anthony Cheetham, Futura's managing director, to write an adventure story related to World War II. After a night on the town he wrote a three-paragraph summary, which the managing director lost; Follett recalled it when sober, received a commission, and wrote the book in three months. *Eye of the Needle* sold 5 million copies worldwide and was adapted for the screen by Stanley Mann and released by United Artists in 1981. The book also launched Follett's interest in World War II, a backdrop that would factor greatly in the works to follow.

*Triple*, published in 1979, was Follett's second best seller. It brought in \$2.5 million and a three-book, \$3-million deal with New American Library and took nine months to write. Criticized for being technically inept, *Triple* was praised for showing both sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Conversely, *The Key to Rebecca*, published in 1980, had a first printing of one hundred thousand

copies, was subsidized by the leading book clubs, and serialized in several magazines. Follett took a year to write the novel and his care is reflected in the quality of its prose and characterization. It is based roughly on accounts of Erwin Rommel's 1942 North African campaign, and includes a plausible portrait of Anwar-el-Sadat as a young Egyptian army officer who is one of the leaders of the Egyptian nationalist movement.

**Even More Fame** *On the Wings of Eagles*, published in 1983, capitalized on American bitterness over the Iran hostage crisis. In 1979, fifty-two American diplomats were taken hostage by Iranian revolutionaries opposed to U.S. intervention in their country. Though the hostages were ultimately released, the event soured relations between Iran and the United States. The book is a non-fiction account of Texas industrialist H. Ross Perot's successful rescue of two senior corporate executives from Tehran. Imprisoned during the 1979 anti-American and revolutionary movement, the executives escaped during a mob attack on the prison (assisted by the rescue team) and trekked across hostile territory to meet Perot in rural Turkey. According to Sanford Silverburg in the August 1983 *Library Journal*, this book "captures the anarchy of the Iranian revolution, the ineffectiveness of the American embassy there, and the boldness of one prominent American entrepreneur."

His 1989 novel *The Pillars of the Earth*, which Follett himself is said to regard as his finest work, has taken on a cult status since its publication. Set in the mid-twelfth century, the historical novel is concerned with the building of a Kingsbridge, England castle. For medievalists, the work's Gothic backdrop and tone combined with thriller characteristics made *Pillars* a must-read. The novel became Follett's best-selling work, listed at number thirty-three on the BBC's *Big Read*, a 2003 survey with the goal of finding the "Nation's Best-loved Book" and was a selection for Oprah's Book Club in November of 2007.

**Continued High Times** Along with *The Pillars of the Earth*, *A Dangerous Fortune* (1993), and *A Place Called Freedom* (1995) have also been blockbuster successes, due to his early diligence. His latest work, *World Without End* (2007), took three years to write. In the duration, he has continued to be a prominent Labour supporter, fundraiser, and occasional contributor to *Writer* magazine.

## Works in Literary Context

**Influences** Although he is quiet about specific details of his past, in an interview with Simon Townley of *News for Medievalists*, Follett asserted, "I get inspiration from history, I read about something like, for example, the bankruptcy of the Berring Bank back in 1990. I read an article about it and I thought it would be worth looking at."

**Popular Fiction** Follett is a popular writer. He relies but little on metaphor and allusion and broadens the scope of his works beyond the specific facts and the series of coincidences only to play around with popular psychology, at times with feminist or romantic trappings. A. J. Mayer, in the September 29, 1980, issue of *Newsweek*, argues that, "Follett is no literary stylist," though "his clean, purposeful prose is more than adequate to the demands of his tightly plotted fast-moving story." Follett focuses on simple writing that provides a clear image in the mind of the reader, which emphasizes his carefully plotted action. Follett himself describes this style as "transparent," designed to allow the reader to enjoy the story without calling attention to the prose itself.

### Works in Critical Context

While several of Follett's works have gained an international following in one respect and mixed reviews in another, several stand out as most often read, shared, and discussed—among them *Eye of the Needle*.

***Eye of the Needle* (1978)** In the August 7, 1978, *Newsweek*, Peter Prescott called *Eye of the Needle* "rubbish of the very best sort," "a triumph of invention over convention" characterized by a "remarkable pace," an "astute use of violence," a "sense of particular environments," and of "occasionally felicitous prose." Likewise, Richard Freedman of the *New York Times Book Review* said it is "a thriller that really thrills, on both the visceral and intellectual levels," while Roderick MacLeish of *Book World-Washington Post* labeled it "a great flight-and-pursuit novel" and found its plot equal to a Frederick Forsyth novel and its writing of a quality with John Le Carré; he praises the book as "the best spy novel to come out of England in years."

### Responses to Literature

1. While Reading *The Pillars of the Earth*, consider the character of Alfred. Why do you think he is so repugnant? In Part V, how do you feel when Alfred goes to Jack and grovels for a job?
2. For many years, Follett has been inspired by not only World War II themes but themes of good and evil. Who or what do you think is good in *The Pillars of the Earth*? Who or what do you see as evil? What similarities and differences would you say exist between the two? Would you say good or evil ruled?

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## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Follett once said, "I have to be fascinated by what I am doing. World War II is the era I have been most comfortable with. I have written four novels set in that time and I am sure I'll write more. It's an exciting period to write about, the whole world felt involved in a battle of good and evil." Equally fascinated with their subjects are some of Follett's fellow writers and their hallmark works:

*The Eagle Has Landed* (1975), a novel by Jack Higgins. In this novel of political intrigue set against a World War II backdrop, the writing is so enduring readers have been known to credit the characters for its longevity.

*The Shawl* (1990), a novella by Cynthia Ozick. In this poetic novella of the Holocaust, a woman named Rosa protects her baby under a shawl, even though the baby is dead.

*Winds of War* (1971), a novel by Herman Wouk. In this immense work, readers get epic, adventure, love, and romance at once.

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## C. S. Forester

BORN: 1899, Cairo, Egypt

DIED: 1966, Fullerton, California, U.S.A.

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*The African Queen* (1935)

*The General* (1936)



C. S. Forester *Evening Standard* / Hulton Archive / Getty Images

*Captain Horatio Hornblower* (1939)  
*The Good Shepherd* (1955)

## Overview

A prolific author whose career spanned over forty years, C. S. Forester wrote action and adventure novels characterized by historical detail and unpretentious language. The British author was an outstanding storyteller who wrote highly cinematic fiction, and many of his books were adapted for film, including *The African Queen* (1935). His careful research and absorbing plots made him one of the top producers of popular fiction in English in the mid-twentieth century.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***Birth in Egypt*** C. S. Forester was born Cecil Lewis Troughton Smith in Cairo on August 27, 1899, the son of George Smith, an official in the Egyptian Ministry of Education, and his wife, Sarah (née Troughton). His mother returned home to England with Forester and his four older siblings so they could be educated there. From early on, he read voraciously, a book a day or more. He also developed a precocious interest in naval battles and military strategy.

***Effects of War*** In secondary school during World War I, Forester attended Officers' Training Corps but was disqualified for military service due to a heart condition. World War I was caused by territorial tensions and entangling alliances that were spun into action by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The war soon engulfed nearly the whole of Europe, resulting in massive loss of life for soldiers and civilians alike. Nearly a million British soldiers alone were killed, wiping out much of a generation of young men.

In August 1918, bereft of friends lost in the war, which was nearing its end, Forester went on a solitary four-week camping trip. During the trip he came to terms with his rejection for military service and decided to enter medical school; however, he turned out to have a profound ineptitude for anatomy. In 1921, he adopted the pen name Cecil Scott Forester and embarked on a career as an author.

***Two Books a Year*** Forester wrote his first novel in two weeks at the astonishing rate of six thousand words a day, had it typed, and sent it off to a publishing house. After four rejections, Forester gave up on the manuscript and started another. This time he injected an element of discipline into his efforts, slashing his daily production by two-thirds. By his own admission, he had not yet mastered the art of fully developing his ideas prior to commencing work. Forester would later disparage the second novel as "very bad." Nevertheless, *The Paid Piper* (1924) would later become his third published book.

Forester's third literary effort, *A Pawn among Kings* (1924), about Napoléon Bonaparte's Russian campaign, was his first published book. Before it appeared, its publisher commissioned Forester to write a biography of Napoléon for an advance of twenty-five pounds, the first money he had earned as a writer. He subsequently wrote the biography *Josephine, Napoleon's Empress* (1925). He would later consider this phase of his career as hackwork, and his earnings were less than he had anticipated. To ensure a subsistence income, he estimated, he needed to produce at least two books a year. He supplemented his income with more biographies and articles for trade periodicals for goldsmiths, pawnbrokers, and bus drivers.

***Improved Literary Status*** The thriller *Payment Deferred* (1926) began to establish Forester's reputation. The novel, about a bank clerk who sees an opportunity to advance by poisoning his nephew, was later adapted for the stage and screen. Keeping up his prolific pace, he published ten works in five years, including three in 1929: a biography of Horatio Nelson, a travel book, and his first work of naval fiction, *Brown on Resolution*, about a captured seaman in World War I.

***Off to Hollywood*** In 1932, Forester moved his family to California to write for the burgeoning motion picture industry in Hollywood while continuing to crank out

historical and military fiction. At this time, motion pictures were becoming a big business in the United States in part because of the transition from silent to sound films. The demands of sound movies led to increased opportunities for writers who produced scripts for the assembly-like production of films in this period.

Forester wrote two of his finest novels in the mid-1930s. In *The African Queen* (1935), set during World War I, a missionary's daughter and a rough-mannered boat captain plan an attack on a German gunboat. *The General* (1936), sometimes considered Forester's masterpiece, is a satire of the military mentality and the shortcomings of military organization in World War I. It recounts the rise of an incompetent English officer to the rank of lieutenant general. Hitler apparently saw the character of General Curzon as the epitome of British military ineptitude and ordered his generals supplied with translations.

***Hornblower at Sea*** Forester's deep appreciation for naval life in the Napoleonic era likely has its roots in Egypt, where he was born and spent his early years: British naval hero Horatio Nelson scored a massive victory over Napoleon's forces in the Battle of the Nile in 1798. The story of Nelson's cunning and bravery was no doubt recounted for the young Brit living, as he did, in the shadow of this major military triumph. In 1937, during a six-week voyage on a merchant ship, Forester began to develop the heroic character Captain Horatio Hornblower (clearly named after the hero of the Nile, Nelson), with whom he would forever be linked. Forester did not intend a whole series of Hornblower novels when he wrote *The Happy Return* (1937). He turned from the Hornblower character and covered the Spanish Civil War (a struggle for control of Spain between Nationalists, led by General Francisco Franco, and Republicans, who wanted to continue the Spanish Republic founded in 1931) for the *New York Times*. Afterward, he conceived the idea of depicting Hornblower's entire naval career.

A reluctant hero, introspective and tenacious, Hornblower represented heroism and martial fortitude for millions of readers. The eleven novels in the *Hornblower* cycle leap back and forth in chronology, chronicling his role in the Napoleonic Wars and his advancement through the ranks of the British navy from midshipman in 1794 to admiral of the fleet in 1848. The remarkably popular Hornblower novels were often serialized in the *Saturday Evening Post* and other periodicals. The first three in the series were published together as *Captain Horatio Hornblower* in 1939.

***Wartime Activities*** In 1938, Forester returned to Europe as a correspondent for the *New York Times* and witnessed the German annexation of Czechoslovakia. By this time, Nazi Germany, led by dictator Adolf Hitler, was acting on its territorial ambitions by taking over country after country in Europe. While the British and French implemented a policy of appeasement (which allowed

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Forester's famous contemporaries include:

**Winston Churchill** (1874–1965): British politician and Nobel Prize-winning historian; prime minister during World War II.

**Graham Greene** (1904–1991): British author of literary thrillers, including *Stamboul Train* (1932).

**Agatha Christie** (1890–1976): Immensely popular British novelist and playwright known for detective stories and murder mysteries such as *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934).

**Ernest Hemingway** (1899–1961): American novelist known for works depicting male heroism, such as *A Farewell to Arms* (1929).

**James Michener** (1907–1997): American novelist; author of meticulously researched historical sagas like *Texas* (1985).

Germany to annex territories for several years) in hopes of avoiding war, they finally saw that this policy would not work and declared war on Germany when it invaded Poland in September 1939. The war soon engulfed most of Europe, later included a Pacific theater of action, and many countries became involved worldwide.

During World War II, Forester produced propaganda material for the British Ministry of Information. His duties gave him the opportunity to travel on British warships. In the summer of 1943, on board the USS *Tennessee*, he experienced severe pains in his legs. He was diagnosed with arteriosclerosis (the hardening of arteries resulting in reduced blood flow) in the legs, a condition which sometimes led to amputation. Although friends thought he should retire, Forester's habit of writing a thousand words a day helped him reconcile himself to his situation. He suffered a severe heart attack in 1948, but as an aid to recuperation, he wrote the next Hornblower book, *Mr. Midshipman Hornblower* (1950), which begins to fill in details of his hero's origins.

***Tales of Fighting Sail*** Aside from the Hornblower novels, Forester continued to produce well-regarded works of swashbuckling fiction with a great variety of historical and military settings. *The Earthly Paradise* (1940), for example, is set against the background of Christopher Columbus's third voyage to the New World in 1498. *The Captain from Connecticut* (1941) progresses down the American coast to the Caribbean during the War of 1812. Forester also wrote a nonfiction account of that war, *The Age of Fighting Sail* (1956), which is also an exciting narrative. One of his best works, *The Ship* (1943), follows the British warship *Artemis* as it



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Forester's literary bailiwick was the open sea, where much of the world's great adventure literature is set, including the following:

*Odyssey* (eighth century B.C.E.), an epic poem by Homer.

The epic poem of the ancient Greeks recounts the adventures of Odysseus as he returns home to Ithaca after the Trojan War.

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1797), a poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This legendary poem, one of the early works of Romantic literature, is the source of the phrase "an albatross around one's neck."

*Moby Dick* (1851), a novel by Herman Melville. This great American novel pits man against whale in a fateful struggle to the death.

*Captain Blood* (1922), a novel by Rafael Sabatini. An Irish doctor, deported to the Caribbean, becomes a buccaneer in this popular adventure novel.

*The Far Side of the World* (1984), a novel by Patrick O'Brian. The tenth novel in a well-regarded nautical series follows Jack Aubrey aboard the HMS *Surprise* during the War of 1812.

escorts a convoy to the besieged island of Malta during World War II. Forester intersperses descriptions of action with the personal histories of various crew members.

Following World War II, Forester wrote two dark, reflective novels: *The Sky and the Forest* (1948) and *Randall and the River of Time* (1950). *The Sky and the Forest*, a somber work about the African slave trade in the nineteenth century, is also an allegorical criticism of imperialist ideology. One of his most appreciated stories is *The Good Shepherd* (1955), in which an American commander tries to protect a convoy from German submarines in 1943. It is perhaps Forester's most intense study of one of his predominant themes: the individual charged with solitary responsibility and the stresses that independent command places on character.

Forester's health declined following another heart attack in 1962. He died on April 2, 1966. The eleventh Horatio Hornblower novel, *Hornblower and the Crisis* (1967), was published posthumously, as was Forester's autobiography.

### Works in Literary Context

Forester's literary sensibilities, and his interest in naval battles and military strategy, were formed at an early age. Some of the material that he devoured in his youth, such as Robert Leighton's *The Thirsty Sword* (1892) and H. Rider Haggard's novels, certainly influenced his later work, as can be seen in his depictions of physical combat.

The sea writings of Frederick Marryat prefigured the nautical genre Forester helped to define. Forester enjoyed reading nautical and military studies, particularly of the Napoleonic period. No less than fifteen of Forester's novels relate to the era of the great French emperor, who fascinated Forester and whom he considered the Hitler of the nineteenth century. Many scholars see in the character of Horatio Hornblower traces of a real British naval officer from the Napoleonic Wars, Thomas Cochrane.

**"The Man Alone"** A principal theme in the Hornblower novels and several of Forester's other works is that of "the man alone," the solitary hero or commander who must make weighty decisions and overcome mighty obstacles to achieve a worthy objective. This is, of course, a conventional and time-tested definition of heroism, especially of the martial variety. The nautical setting of so many of Forester's stories—in which the protagonist is literally at sea, adrift from civilization, and left to his own devices—enhances the sense of isolation with which Forester imbues his heroes.

**Sensitivity to Class** One notable subtheme in Forester's work is a sharply observed portrayal of class tensions, especially in British society. For example, *Brown on Resolution* savagely satirizes middle-class snobbery, and *The African Queen* reveals the hypocrisy saturating the class system in Britain. But Forester never could remove himself from the conventions of that system. Invariably in his novels, characters from the lower social orders—such as Charlie Allnutt, the protagonist of *The African Queen*—are inarticulate and often display a cringing subservience to their "betters." In the Hornblower series, the author often refers to his hero's poverty and non-aristocratic background. At the same time, the class division between officer and common seaman is never forgotten.

**Cinematic Works** Forester's historical fiction, especially his naval fiction, spawned many imitators due to its immense popularity. The Jack Aubrey novels by Patrick O'Brian, beginning with *Master and Commander* (1970), are among the better contemporary efforts in this mode. Indeed, Thomas Cochrane served as a model for the character of Jack Aubrey. More broadly, Forester's skills at plot and action, and his penchant for historical verisimilitude, set a standard for popular literature as well as film.

### Works in Critical Context

**The Hornblower Saga** Forester will be remembered as a crackerjack writer of popular fiction largely due to the success of his Hornblower saga. The character Horatio Hornblower became a symbol of pride for British citizens during World War II. Eight million copies of the works that recounted his adventures were sold in Forester's

lifetime. The author grasped the imagination of his public, providing it with a hero whose qualities, while stereotypically British, could flourish in the American literary market. A lively Horatio Hornblower fan culture thrives today, with conventions and Internet blogs, but it is surprising that so little critical or scholarly interest has been shown in the work of so prolific and socially conscious a writer. Besides a telling biography about Forester written by his son, John Forester, that reveals a strained relationship between them and a more scholarly biography penned by literary critic Sanford Sternlicht, little else has been written about Forester. A great deal of research remains to be done.

***The African Queen*** It is likely that Forester's best-known work is *The African Queen*, whose film adaptation is now considered a classic American film. Unlike the Hornblower novels, *The African Queen* was a critical success upon its publication in 1935. Critics agreed that certain elements of the story were somewhat implausible, but conceded that Forester makes it worth the reader's while to set this fact aside. In the *New York Times Book Review*, Percy Hutchison concluded, "The credulity of the reader may be stretched here and there, but, having given himself to the tale, as one must always give one's self up wholeheartedly to romance or eschew it altogether, he will go on. Suspended again and again in midair, he will find pleasure in the suspense, a device of which Mr. Forester again and again proves himself a master." In her *Saturday Review of Literature* review, Amy Loveman wrote that Forester "has sufficient skill in characterization, sufficient psychological subtlety, to lift his story above the general run of adventure yarns, and enlist interest in his hero and heroine as personalities and not mere lay figures on which to hang excitement."

## Responses to Literature

1. Compare Horatio Hornblower to one or two contemporary action heroes in a visual presentation. Does the comparison tell you anything about how times have changed? Explain.
2. Why did the Hornblower novels, set during the Napoleonic Wars, resonate with the British public during the Second World War? Write a paper with your findings.
3. Write about the characteristics of narrative and plot in Forester's action novels, citing several of his works.
4. *The General* is often considered an antiwar novel, but Forester wrote many war stories and detailed battle scenes. What were Forester's attitudes on the subject of war?
5. The character of Napoléon figures in several of Forester's books. Evaluate how Forester portrays the

Corsican general. Create a presentation in which you share your findings.

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## E. M. Forster

BORN: 1879, London, England

DIED: 1970, Coventry, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*A Room with a View* (1908)

*Howards End* (1910)

*A Passage to India* (1924)

## Overview

One of the most influential and highly regarded authors in the British canon, E. M. Forster published only five novels during his lifetime—the first four of those between 1905 and 1910. He built a reputation as a novelist of distinction and as a persuasive man of letters. He attained the greatest recognition and authority, however, after World War II, long after publishing *A Passage to India*—his most significant novel by far—in 1924. In fact, by the time he had reached the height of his public renown as a novelist, he had nearly stopped writing fiction altogether. Though his reputation and influence have suffered since his death in 1970, he still commands the respect and enthusiasm of critics and general readers alike for his many virtues as a fiction writer and essayist.





E. M. Forster Forster, E.M., photograph. Edward Gooch / Hulton Archive / Getty Images.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***Love of the Countryside and Unhappy School Years*** Edward Morgan Forster was born in London on January 1, 1879. His father died a year and a half later. His great-aunt left him a legacy of eight thousand pounds when she died in 1887, making it possible for him to receive without strain a university education and to devote himself to a career as a writer without worrying about other employment.

Possibly the most important aspect of Forster's early life was his residence with his mother at Rooksnest, a house in Hertfordshire near Stevenage. Here Forster developed his love for the English countryside, and Rooksnest became the model for Howards End house and farm in *Howards End* (1910). He attended a preparatory school at Eastbourne and then became a day student at Tonbridge School. The family, meanwhile, had to leave Rooksnest to reside in Tonbridge. These years at school were unhappy for Forster, and he later reflected on this disaffection in his depiction of Sawston School in *The Longest Journey* (1907).

***Inspiration at Cambridge*** The Tonbridge years gave way to the excitement of university life and an

accompanying broadening of horizons. Forster's closest friend in his undergraduate years was H. O. Meredith, who helped make him conscious of his homosexual inclinations and who became the prototype for Clive Durham in Forster's novel *Maurice* (published posthumously in 1971, but written largely in 1914).

***The Apostles and the Bloomsbury Group*** What Cambridge meant for Forster, he revealed directly and by implication in the early chapters of *The Longest Journey* and in *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson* (1934), a biography of his Cambridge friend and mentor. In *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson*, Forster asserted that it was possible in the relaxed but stimulating ambiance at Cambridge for a young man to unite into a meaningful whole the various and different powers of his nature. Through H. O. Meredith's influence Forster became a member of the Cambridge Conversazione Society, otherwise known as the Apostles, a group of young men who passionately discussed moral, intellectual, and aesthetic issues and who were to form the nucleus of the later cluster of intellectuals known as the Bloomsbury Group (named after the neighborhood in London where many of its members lived). The Apostles during Forster's time at the university and immediately thereafter included Lytton Strachey, John Maynard Keynes, Leonard Woolf, Desmond MacCarthy, and Saxon Sydney-Turner; Roger Fry was a member from an earlier time.

Forster felt a strong affinity to many of the "Bloomsbury" values, which included friendship, speculative discussion, a persistent questioning of tradition and convention, agnosticism, advocacy of social change, an appreciation of innovation in the arts, and a testing of moral values. He dramatized vividly the quintessential Bloomsbury values in the Schlegel sisters in *Howards End*, in Fielding and Adela Quested in *A Passage to India* (1924), and in his own eloquent credo, written later in his career, *What I Believe* (1939; reprinted in *Two Cheers for Democracy*, 1951).

***A Teacher and a Writer*** In 1902, Forster became an instructor at the Working Men's College in London, an affiliation that lasted for twenty years. At the suggestion of Nathaniel Wedd, Forster's tutor and friend at Cambridge, he also decided to become a writer. The years from 1903 to 1910 were years of extraordinary creative release for Forster. He wrote four novels of surpassing force and insight, all of them now recognized as Edwardian classics: *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), *The Longest Journey* (1907), *A Room with a View* (1908), and *Howards End* (1910).

***A Conscientious Objector to World War I*** After his time at Cambridge, Forster traveled extensively with his mother, writing travel essays and histories that set the stage for the novel most frequently recognized as his greatest, *A Passage to India* (1924). Following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the

Austro-Hungarian throne, World War I broke out in 1914. Forster did not serve in a military capacity because he objected to the war, however, he did work at a hospital for the Red Cross in Egypt from 1916 until 1917.

***Achieving Literary Fame and Deteriorating Health*** When Forster published *A Passage to India* in 1924, he was in his mid-forties and was already a respected and relatively successful novelist. This novel, however, catapulted him to literary fame and popular acclaim. He had struggled in writing it, though, and thereafter he turned away from fiction, concentrating his creative energies on essay writing and political engagement. In the 1930s and 1940s, Forster gained public prominence in part because his essays kept bringing him before the public. In his public utterances he revealed a deep commitment to values that first the Depression and then the Nazi rise to power and World War II placed under threat; and, in the years after 1945, he enjoyed international prestige. He also suffered his first stroke in 1964, though, and a more serious one the next year; his health deteriorated gradually thereafter. He had to give up what had been an active life of traveling and speaking engagements, though he remained intellectually acute until his death. He suffered a massive stroke on May 22, 1970, and died on June 7, 1970.

### Works in Literary Context

E. M. Forster's novels are often witty, filled with sharp observations, and deeply realist in their descriptions of the world. When he stopped writing novels and turned his attention primarily to essays, these same qualities contributed to his great popularity as an essayist and public speaker. Similar in style to the novels of Jane Austen, Forster's fiction works focus on three major themes: salvation through love, the deficiency of traditional Christianity, and the repressive nature of English culture. These themes are underscored by numerous allusions to paganism and mythology and are infused with Forster's liberal humanism and subtle wit. Most readers and critics would align him in the quality of his work—though not in breadth and comprehensiveness—with such modern writers as Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, and D. H. Lawrence. As noted, his work was influenced by members of the Bloomsbury Group, including Lytton Strachey, John Maynard Keynes, Leonard Woolf, Desmond MacCarthy, and Saxon Sydney-Turner, and Roger Fry.

***The Edwardian Novels*** Forster's first four novels (as well as a fifth, written at the same time, but not published until after his death) are generally considered Edwardian in style and theme. These novels—*Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), *The Longest Journey* (1907), *A Room with a View* (1908), and *Howards End* (1910)—are rooted in his depiction of the life and manners of the upper-middle class that he knew from the inside. He had the insider's love of this society despite its shortcomings, but he also

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Forster's famous contemporaries include:

**D. H. Lawrence** (1885–1930): English writer best known for his novels *Sons and Lovers* and *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, and described by Forster in an obituary notice as "the greatest imaginative novelist of our generation."

**Virginia Woolf** (1882–1945): A prominent author and feminist philosopher, Woolf was another member of the Bloomsbury Group. Her best-known novels include *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, while *A Room of One's Own*, in which she argues that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction," is probably her most highly regarded nonfiction piece.

**Charles de Gaulle** (1890–1970): French general Charles de Gaulle was a leader of the resistance to the Nazi regime in France during World War II; he later founded France's Fifth Republic in 1958 and was the most influential political leader in modern French history.

**Pablo Picasso** (1881–1973): Spanish visual artist Pablo Picasso was a cofounder of the Cubist movement, and one of the most influential painters of the modern era.

**Albert Einstein** (1879–1955): German-born theoretical physicist Albert Einstein is perhaps the most famous scientist of all time, and the mind behind the theory of relativity.

knew its shortcomings as only an insider could. Accordingly, he appreciated its amenities and its graciousness, but also critiqued strongly its frivolousness and materialistic obsessions. He had the insight, however, to see that people could themselves change, even when living in a society that was essentially static. And the finer spirits in this milieu, he saw, were enabled by their wealth to appreciate, without undue stress, the resources of culture, the renovating influence of nature, and the potential fullness of the inner life of the spirit and mind.

***The Supernatural*** In Forster's early short stories he is most clearly a fantasy writer by any definition, wide or narrow. These stories have generally been admired for their originality and lucid style, but they have seldom been granted the same attention as his novels. "The Story of a Panic" (1904), the first story he wrote, and "Albergo Empedocle," the first of his stories that achieved publication (in the magazine *Temple Bar*, December 1903), were both products of the revelatory experience his travels in Italy had been to him. They both deal with British middle-class tourists in Italy faced with phenomena that defy their understanding. In both, an apparently dimwitted youth undergoes a transformation that is alarming and incomprehensible to his travel companions. The

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The tendency for writers of fiction, poetry, and drama to dabble in essay writing is well known, but few have been as committed to the latter genre as Forster. As a political essayist, Forster is, among modern writers, second in importance perhaps only to George Orwell. Below are some other examples of modern political essays by writers of fiction and drama:

“Shooting an Elephant” (1936), an essay by George Orwell. A classic anti-imperialist piece in which Orwell examines the way the enforcers of imperial authority become trapped in positions of stupid cruelty.

*Brave New World Revisited* (1958), a nonfiction book by Aldous Huxley. Here, Huxley considers whether the world has become more or less politically destitute in the nearly thirty years that have passed since he wrote the dystopic novel *Brave New World* (1932), about an increasingly totalitarian society.

“Socialism and Liberty” (1928), an essay by George Bernard Shaw. In this work Shaw offers an explanation of the ways in which personal liberty need not be constrained by a socialist system, as it had been in the Soviet Union. The essay appeared in a larger volume entitled *The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism and Fascism*.

theme uniting these and most stories by Forster is that of another life not ruled by conventions that cripple natural impulses and the potential for self-realization.

In his two major novels, *Howards End* and *A Passage to India*, the supernatural is ostensibly absent, but the author obviously endeavors to invest his plot and characters with a degree of universal significance. In *Howards End* a visualization of Ludwig van Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony as a battle between good and evil forces develops into a symbolic pattern underlying the novel, and in *A Passage to India* the echo in the Marabar Caves, where a young Englishwoman imagines she has been sexually assaulted by an Indian, becomes a recurrent theme integrated into the novel as a whole, suggestive of both the immensity and the emptiness of the universe.

**An Essayist and Humanist** Perhaps Forster’s most notable development as a writer in the late 1920s and afterwards was as an essayist. As such, Forster wrote commentaries on outstanding individuals of the past and present, on social problems, on political questions, on aesthetics and the arts, on the spell of the past, on the fascination of distant places (including the Orient), on the threat of war, and on the actual cataclysm of the war itself. Forster’s point of view was that of the engaged humanist; his stance varied from an objective

analysis of a situation, personality, or book to familiar utterances in which his own temperament and preferences predominated.

**Influence** Forster continues to be one of the most widely studied novelists in world literature, but though his novels were established early as classics, Forster never enjoyed tremendous popular success. Morton Dauwen Zabel writes that Forster had “no stylistic followers and perhaps few disciples in thought, yet if one were fixing the provenance of [W. H.] Auden’s generation, Forster’s name—whatever the claim of [Henry] James, Lawrence, or Eliot—would suggest the most accurate combination of critical and temperamental forces, the only one stamped by the peculiarly English skeptical sensibility that survived the war with sanity.”

### Works in Critical Context

Forster’s works are admired for their believable characterizations that simultaneously serve as representations of abstract ideas. Frederick P. W. McDowell observes,

A fascination exerted by characters who grip our minds; a wit and beauty present in an always limpid style; a passionate involvement with life in all its variety; a view of existence alive to its comic incongruities and to its tragic implications; and a steady adherence to humanistic values which compel admiration . . . such are the leading aspects of Forster’s work that continually lure us to it.

**A Passage to India** *A Passage to India*, which is widely regarded as Forster’s masterpiece, draws on his own experiences in India during visits there in 1912 and 1921. This novel’s acclaim derives from its portrayal of diverse cultures—Muslim, Hindu, and Christian—and the difficulties inherent in their coexistence. Forster explores in *A Passage to India* the Hindu principle of total acceptance, employing this philosophy to suggest an integrating force for which, as events in the novel suggest, the world is unprepared. The unpreparedness of the world outside India for this principle is exemplified by an episode in the Marabar Caves, where Mrs. Moore, an elderly British matron, presumably experiences nihilistic despair upon hearing an echo suggesting to her that “nothing has value.” Mrs. Moore, unlike the Hindus, is unable to assimilate this despair into the totality of her religious sensibility, and she succumbs to spiritual passivity. This crucial scene represents, according to Philip Gardner, “The enigmatic and frightening side of spiritual experience, the sense of chaos and nothingness whose effects spill over and make the conclusion of the novel equivocal.”

### Responses to Literature

1. In *Howards End*, Margaret’s philosophy of “Only connect” and Henry’s adage, “Concentrate,” seem contradictory in important ways. What contradictions and conflicts between the two ideas do you see?

Which idea would you say wins out in the novel, and why?

2. Compare and contrast two of Forster's novels in terms of their dependence on fate or coincidence. What does Forster seem to be communicating about our role in the universe, and about a human capacity for change—or lack thereof?
3. What role does negation play in *A Passage to India*? Look for places where the word “nothing” appears, descriptions of things in terms of what they are not, and moments in the plot where it appears that “nothing” is happening, or where characters think something is happening but it is not. What is the importance of negation with regard to the larger themes of the novel? With regard to Forster's critique of British colonialism in India?
4. When you think about Forster's interest in the supernatural and in experiences beyond what is commonly considered rationality, what feelings or responses does that provoke in you? In what ways does your response reflect the prejudices of your own culture? In what ways is it a rejection of those prejudices? Research other writers in the tradition of literary realism, and consider their attachments to the paranormal or supernatural. Why might a genre dedicated to a realistic portrayal of the world as it is produce so many texts that include irrational, mystical, or metaphysical elements?

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## Frederick Forsyth

BORN: 1938, Ashford, Kent, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Day of the Jackal* (1971)

*The Odessa File* (1972)

*The Dogs of War* (1974)

### Overview

Frederick Forsyth is one of the world's leading writers of suspenseful thrillers. Since the 1971 publication of *The Day of the Jackal*, he has written a string of best-selling novels featuring realistic international crises. Forsyth's ability to depict the operations of large organizations and his insider's descriptions of military and governmental operations have been especially noted by critics.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

#### *The Youngest Fighter Pilot Turns to Journalism*

Forsyth was born in Ashford, Kent, England, in 1938 and educated at Tonbridge School, where he studied French and German. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1956 and



Frederick Forsyth Forsyth, Frederick, photograph. AP Images.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Forsyth's famous contemporaries include:

**Robert Ludlum** (1927–2001): American author of more than two dozen bestselling thrillers, include the popular *Bourne* series.

**Helmut Kohl** (1930–): German politician and chancellor of Germany from 1990 to 1998 (and of West Germany from 1982 to 1990).

**Tom Clancy** (1947–): American author of best-selling political thrillers such as *The Hunt for Red October*.

**Rajiv Gandhi** (1944–1991): Seventh prime minister of India, assassinated by a suicide bomber during his 1991 campaign.

served as its youngest fighter pilot (at age nineteen) before entering a career in journalism. From 1958 to 1961, he was a reporter for the *Eastern Daily Press*, first in Norwich and later in King's Lynn, Norfolk; in 1961 he was a Reuters correspondent and traveled between London, Paris, and East Berlin, serving as bureau chief in the East German capital because of his knowledge of languages. Next he served as a BBC radio reporter in London between 1965 and 1967, an assistant diplomatic correspondent for BBC Television in 1967, and a freelance journalist in Nigeria in 1967 and 1968 after his pro-Biafran coverage offended Sir David Hunt, British high commissioner in Lagos.

**From Journalist to Award-Winning Novelist** Forsyth's coverage of the Biafran war led to his one major work of nonfiction, *The Biafra Story* (1969; revised as *The Making of an African Legend: The Biafra Story*, 1977). The Biafran war was a civil war in Nigeria (1967–1970), fought as the oil-rich region of Biafra sought to secede from a Nigeria dominated by an oppressive government that in some ways resembled the British colonial administration from which Nigeria had gained its independence. Shortly thereafter, drawing heavily on his experience in journalism, Forsyth published *The Day of the Jackal*, his first novel. For this work he received the Mystery Writers of America Edgar Allan Poe Award (1971) for Best Novel. Forsyth told J. Bonfante in 1971 that he had no literary ambitions but to be merely a commercial writer whose intent was to sell copies and make money. He claims that *The Day of the Jackal* was born of his need "to ease a financially embarrassed position."

Forsyth's novels are usually set in the cities and countries where he worked as a news correspondent. *The Day of the Jackal*, for example, takes place in several western European countries and comes to a climax in

Paris. *The Odessa File* is based on Forsyth's time in East Berlin, where he first became aware of the existence of an underground Nazi organization that protected war criminals from prosecution. *The Dogs of War* concerns a fictional African country in the throes of revolution and is based on his experiences in Biafra. From Nazi war criminals to Biafran "freedom fighters" to international terrorist organizations, Forsyth has consistently covered key world events in his fiction, offering readers their own fear back to them, packaged as fiction and neatly resolved in the end.

## Works in Literary Context

**The Documentary Thriller** Realism is the key word behind the novels of Frederick Forsyth. Often credited as the originator of a new genre, the "documentary thriller," Forsyth found sudden fame with the publication of his smash-hit best seller, *The Day of the Jackal*, a book that combines the suspense of an espionage novel with the detailed realism of the documentary novel, a genre first made popular by Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. The detail in Forsyth's novels depends not only on the months of research he spends on each book but also on his own varied personal experiences, which lend even greater authenticity to his writing. As *Dictionary of Literary Biography* contributor Andrew F. Macdonald explains, "the sense of immediacy, on an insider's view of world affairs, of all-too-human world figures," as well as quick-paced plots, are the keys to the author's popularity.

**Political Thrills on the Grandest Scale** Building on the tradition of crime fiction, Forsyth's first novels were published in the 1970s, alongside the last novels by Agatha Christie, a forerunner in what is often referred to as the *Golden Age of Detective Fiction*. However, unlike Christie's comparatively lighthearted tales of detective fiction, many of which were written before World War II, the events of popular political thrillers like Richard Condon's *The Manchurian Candidate* (1959), Fletcher Knebel's *Seven Days in May* (1962), and Forsyth's *The Day of the Jackal* take place on a much larger scale. Reflecting the continued decline in trust in authority, particularly that of one's government, the plots of these novels are structured by conflicts that accompanied the rapid social change following World War II.

**How Machines and Organizations Operate** Forsyth is among the best of contemporary writers at capturing the heart and soul of organizations at work. While most crime novels pay necessary attention to police procedure and the motivation of chief and underling, few writers risk the minute concern with organizational dynamics and the massive amount of detail that truly represent the way organizations do, in fact, operate. It is surely no exaggeration to say that organizations largely create the texture of modern life; yet few novels, crime-oriented or otherwise,



shed much realistic light on their operation. This is Forsyth's forte, with the added bonus of precise technical description worthy of a science writer, of how things work, ranging from the construction of a special rifle (*The Day of the Jackal*, 1971) and improvised car bombs (*The Odessa File*, 1972), to gunrunning (*The Dogs of War*, 1974) and the innards of oil tankers (*The Devil's Alternative*, 1979), to the assembly of miniature nuclear bombs (*The Fourth Protocol*, 1984).

**Journalistic Style** Forsyth's direct, precise writing style is attributable to his early career as a newspaper journalist. The effect of detail invites the reader into the world of the expert, establishing credibility and making the layperson a partner and an insider. Forsyth's disciplined style is more than simple restraint, the resisting of the tempting melodramatic adjective or adverb. Rather, it constitutes a point of view, a "transparency" of style that allows the reader a view of plot and character seemingly untrammelled by authorial guidance.

### Works in Critical Context

Winner of an Edgar Allan Poe Award for *The Day of the Jackal*, Forsyth has been praised for his highly detailed depictions of the inner workings of governmental and military organizations. His ability to present a behind-the-scenes perspective while spinning a complicated plot of international dimensions allows his readers to believe in the story and become willing accomplices in its development.

***The Day of the Jackal*** *The Day of the Jackal*, based on actual attempts to assassinate French president Charles de Gaulle, was written in thirty-five days. It won immediate acclaim and sold 6 million copies in three years. Stanley Elkin, writing for the *New York Times Book Review*, found Forsyth's "implausible villain, a professional assassin whose business card might well read 'Presidents and Premiers My Specialty,'" not only plausible but so professional "that even saintly readers will be hard put not to cheer this particular villain along his devious way." Deservedly Forsyth's best-known book, *The Day of the Jackal* is both a treatise on police procedure and a testimony to the power of a determined individual. *The Day of the Jackal* has been translated into eleven languages. A successful film was made by Universal Pictures in 1973, with Fred Zinnemann directing and Edward Fox playing the Jackal.

*The Day of the Jackal* established a highly successful formula, one repeated by Forsyth and a host of other writers. Critics have praised its powerful effect (adjectives like "riveting" and "gripping" are common), albeit with some qualms about his language. Elkin, for example, talks about his "graceless prose style which shapes up as a lot of recitatif [a recitation blending song and speech] and very little aria [melody]." Forsyth's novels ever since have been criticized for what they do not accomplish more than for what they actually attempt, though he himself

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Foremost among Forsyth's themes is an individual's relationship to the organization. Forsyth suggests that it is the lone professional, whether opposed to the organization or part of it, who truly creates history, but it is a history represented only palely on the front pages of newspapers. Other suspense thrillers that explore this theme include:

*The Hunt for Red October* (1984), a novel by Tom Clancy.

This techno-thriller follows the adventures of Jack Ryan, an ex-marine working part-time for the CIA.

*Seven Days in May* (1962), a novel by Fletcher Knebel. In this political thriller, U.S. president Jordan Lyman learns of a military plot to overthrow him because of dissatisfaction with a treaty he signed with the Soviet Union.

*The Manchurian Candidate* (1959), a novel by Richard Condon. This novel, banned in some communist states, follows a brainwashed son of a political family who has become an assassin for the Communist Party against his will.

*The Bourne Identity* (1980), a spy thriller by Robert Ludlum. In this gripping tale, a man with retrograde amnesia attempts to discover who he is and why several organizations, including the CIA, want to kill him.

refuses to rank his work as *belles-lettres*. Perhaps unfortunately, with each subsequent book, commentators have complained about elements of the formula as faults rather than as essential parts of Forsyth's approach. Michael Crichton, writing for *Saturday Review*, found that the subject matter of *The Odessa File* had "too many reverberations, too many profound moral questions, to fit comfortably in a suspense-novel format." He added that the "use of real background in this instance often seems exploitative in a disagreeable way."

***Sentiment for Fair Play and the Little Guy in the Short Stories*** According to some critics, Forsyth's short stories reveal a gentler and more "literary" sensibility than the hard-driving, masculine persona of the longer novels. However allegedly financial were Forsyth's motives for writing his more successful works, his short stories show a determined sympathy for the vulnerable little man and an almost nostalgic championing of traditional fair play. In spite of their abbreviated length, the stories for the most part showcase fully rounded characters in relatively realistic situations, facing problems that are often quite modest and ordinary. The stories thus offer a more domestic and limited perspective on the themes that inform the longer novels. One story, "There Are No Snakes in Ireland," won Forsyth a second Edgar Allan Poe Award.



## Responses to Literature

1. Discuss the use of realism in *The Day of the Jackal*. Which elements would you consider the most realistic? Which seem like the most far-fetched?
2. Explain how his experience as a war reporter influenced Forsyth's choice of subject matter in his book-length works. Provide examples to support your views.
3. How do you account for the divided critical response to Forsyth's fiction?
4. Keep a reading journal while you read *The Day of the Jackal*. At the end of each chapter, write a short paragraph predicting future events in the plot. After you finish the book, go back and analyze your predictions. If they were correct, what clues did Forsyth provide to help you anticipate the coming events? If not, how did he lead you astray?

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## John Fowles

BORN: 1926, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, England

DIED: 2005, Lyme Regis, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Collector* (1963)

*The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969)

*Poems* (1973)

*The Ebony Tower: Collected Novellas* (1974)

*A Maggot* (1985)

### Overview

While John Fowles's reputation was based mainly on his novels and their film versions, he demonstrated expertise in the fields of nature, art, science, and natural history as reflected in a body of non-fictional writings. Throughout his career, Fowles committed himself to a scholarly exploration of the place of the artist in contemporary society and sought the personal isolation and exile that he felt essential to such a search.



John Fowles Fowles, John, photograph. The Library of Congress.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Intellectual “Heaven” at Oxford** John Fowles was born on March 31, 1926, to middle-class parents Robert John and Gladys Richards Fowles. He attended a London preparatory school, the Bedford School, between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. He then served as a lieutenant in the Royal Marines for two years, but World War II ended before he saw actual combat.

Following the war, Fowles studied French and German at New College, Oxford. He later referred to this period as “three years of heaven in an intellectual sense.” After graduating from Oxford, Fowles began a teaching career that took him first to France, where he taught English at the University of Poitiers, and then to Spetsai, a Greek island, where he taught at Anorgyrios College. It was on Spetsai that Fowles met Elizabeth Whitton. Three years later, on April 2, 1954, they were married in England.

Fowles continued to earn a living through a variety of teaching assignments until the success of his first published work, *The Collector* (1963), allowed him to move with his wife and her daughter to Lyme Regis in Dorset. He continued to live in this quiet seacoast town—intentionally isolated from English literary circles—where he wrote, gardened, and pursued his interests in natural and local history.

**Writing Career Begins** It was not until Fowles was in his early twenties that he began his writing career. After translating a poem by Pierre de Ronsard he was able to overcome a fear of self-expression that he once suggested is common to all Englishmen. Fowles’s first serious attempts at writing took place on Spetsai, amid the natural splendors of the Greek landscape. His experience of the mystery and majesty of this island was a powerful influence. Not only did he write poetry, which appeared later in his collection *Poems*, but this setting also provided the inspiration for *The Magus* (1965), a work that would obsess the writer for many years. Leaving Greece was a painful experience for Fowles, but he felt the move was necessary to his artistic growth. “I had not then realized that loss is essential for the novelist, immensely fertile for his books, however painful to his private being.”

**Submission Delayed** While back in England and teaching in a variety of positions in the London area, Fowles worked on several manuscripts but was dissatisfied with his efforts and submitted none for publication until 1963, when *The Collector* appeared.

The commercial success of *The Collector* enabled Fowles to publish *The Aristos: A Self-Portrait in Ideas* the following year. As the title suggests, this volume consists of a collection of philosophical statements covering diverse areas but aimed at proposing a new, ideal man for our times—the Aristos. The publication of this book at that time probably owed something to the fact that *The*

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Fowles’s famous contemporaries include:

**Richard Burton** (1925–1984): Welsh actor known for, among other things, being outspoken, being the highest paid actor in Hollywood (at one time), and for marrying actress Elizabeth Taylor twice.

**Peter Matthiessen** (1927–): American naturalist, Zen Buddhist, and historical fiction and nonfiction author.

**Peter Sellers** (1925–1980): British comic actor best known for the movies *Pink Panther* and *Being There*.

**John Updike** (1932–): Award-winning American writer of small town, Protestant, white middle-class subjects who has twice won the Pulitzer Prize.

*Collector*, in spite of its popular reception, was denied critical consideration by many who failed to look past its thriller format.

Fowles’s next published work, *The Magus*, published in 1965, was, according to its author, “in every way except that of mere publishing date . . . a first novel.” Using Spetsai as his model, Fowles created the island of Phraxos where Nicholas Urfe, a young English schoolmaster, meets Maurice Conchis, the enigmatic master of an island estate. Through a series of bizarre “godgames,” Conchis engineers the destruction of Nicholas’ perception of reality, a necessary step in the achievement of a true understanding of his being in the world. While *The Magus* was first published in 1965, Fowles issued a revised edition in 1977 in which he had rewritten numerous scenes in an attempt to purify the work he called an “endlessly tortured and recast cripple” which had, nonetheless, “aroused more interest than anything else I have written.”

Fowles was at work on a new manuscript when in 1966 he envisioned a woman in black Victorian garb standing on a wharf and staring out at the sea. She “was Victorian; and since I always saw her in the same static long shot, with her back turned, she represented a reproach on the Victorian Age. An outcast. I didn’t know her crime, but I wished to protect her.” The vision recurred, became an obsession, and led eventually to *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, a Victorian novel in manner, but contemporary and existential in viewpoint. The novel was made into a popular film of the same name in 1981.

In 1974 *Ebony Tower*, a collection of stories, appeared. The work was televised ten years later. The title story focuses on a confrontation between a pseudo-sophisticated man of the world with a reclusive shaman who shatters his poorly conceived notions of reality, a

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In *The Collector*, Fowles contemplates the theme of confrontation between the few versus the many, the artistic versus the conventional. This theme, as well as a concern with freedom, authenticity, and parallel realities, appears in several of his novels. By giving characters their freedom, Fowles liberates himself from the tyranny of rigid planning.

Here are a few works by writers who also produced similar themes or offered similar innovative styles:

*City of Glass* (1986), a novel by Paul Auster. In this, one of the earliest postmodern novels, Auster plays with language, scene, and structure in a combination of detective fiction, existentialism, and intellectual literature.

*If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1981), a novel by Italo Calvino. A comedy, a tragedy, a thoughtful and thought-provoking experience.

*In the Labyrinth* (1959), a novel by Alain Robbe-Grillet. An existential detective novel for the postmodern culture.

theme explored more broadly in *The Magus*. This volume contains a translation of a twelfth-century romance written by Marie de France. Fowles's original title for this collection was *Variations*. While these stories are original and unique, they are connected to each other and to the earlier works by an underlying sense of loss, mystery, and desire for growth.

*Daniel Martin* (1977), perhaps the most autobiographical of Fowles's novels, draws upon his early memories of the Devonshire countryside as well as his later involvement in the Hollywood film industry. *Mantissa* (1982), though more cerebral, demonstrates a continuing concern with the artist's intrapersonal conflicts.

In 1996, a new edition of Fowles's essay "The Tree" was published, and along with it the essay "The Nature of Nature," written some fifteen years later when the author was approaching seventy years of age, suffering from a crippling illness, and taking what one reviewer described as "a more immediate look at last things." In *The Nature of Nature*, Fowles wrote, "Illness has kept me even more alone than usual these last two years and brought me closer to being, though that hasn't always been very pleasant for my body. What has struck me about the acutely rich sensation of beingness is how fleeting its apprehension . . . the more you would capture it, the less likely that you will."

**Freedom** Fowles's roots in Western culture were broad and deep, and he earned a reputation as an innovator in the evolution of the contemporary novel. He was a spokesperson for modern humanity, steeped in science,

yet ever aware that what it more deeply needs is "the existence of mysteries. Not their solutions." In contrast to his public success as a popular and serious "literary" writer, Fowles consistently distanced himself from the middle-class English society that was his familial lot and a source of much resentment toward his father. By the time he died in his home in Lyme Regis, Dorset, Fowles was living a sort of self-imposed exile. His focus in naturalistic writing was combined with his interest in exploring and challenging the traditional devices of storytelling to explore themes related to his alienation. Such themes and concepts as freedom reflect his personal attitude and play a significant role in his public writing. Not only did he refuse to be put into a "cage labeled 'novelist'" as he stated in *The Aristos: A Self-Portrait in Ideas*, but he also rejected any label limiting him to a particular kind of writing. Fowles wrote fiction, poetry, nonfiction, and drama, and also edited, translated, and explored many other forms of writing. This intellectual innovator of style continues to sell millions of copies of his novels, making a number of them bestsellers.

## Works in Literary Context

**Influences** In his years of study at New College, Fowles was exposed to the Celtic romances and the existential works of Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Franz Kafka, and several others. In a personal note in *The Magus*, Fowles paid tribute to the Celtic romance, and in *The Godgame*, he pointed out the influence on his novel by psychologist Carl Jung, author Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* and writer Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*. He was also inspired by French literature, the discipline of psychology, and several other areas of study that lent themselves to his intellectualism and writing.

At the same time, Fowles had a profound effect on serious readers, mainstream readers, and his many students who would consult him for reading lists. He never had one, but his followers would read whatever he would mention or recommend.

**The Artistic Versus the Conventional** One of Fowles's signature themes is represented in his novel *The Collector*. In the book, Frederick Clegg, a poorly educated clerk of the lower class and an amateur lepidopterist—a scientist who studies butterflies and moths—becomes obsessed with a beautiful young art student, Miranda Grey. Clegg wins a large sum of money in a football pool, enabling him to carry out a plan of kidnap and imprisonment. The first part of the book is told from Clegg's point of view and the second is told from the imprisoned Miranda's perspective. The characters of Miranda and Clegg embody the conflict that Fowles, reaching back to Greek philosopher Heraclitus, finds central to mankind—the few versus the many, the artistic versus the conventional. As Fowles noted, "My purpose in *The*

*Collector* was to analyze, through a parable, some of the results of this confrontation.” This theme, as well as a concern with freedom and authenticity and parallel realities, recurred in later novels. Miranda, according to Fowles, “is an existential heroine although she doesn’t know it. She’s groping for her own authenticity.”

### Works in Critical Context

At times Fowles gained mixed attention for his work. For instance, *Daniel Martin* appeared in 1977 to uneven reviews. While some critics faulted its rambling structure and lack of narrative suspense, others regarded it as a more honest, straightforward recounting of personal confrontation with one’s own history. In the same respect, several of his works have earned much positive acclaim, including *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*.

***The French Lieutenant’s Woman*** When *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* was published in 1969, it met with critical and popular success. James Aronson, in the *Antioch Review*, stated that with this novel, Fowles showed himself to be “a novelist as great as [Joyce] Carey and [E. M.] Forster.” Paul Edward Gray of the *Yale Review* called it “a modishly-framed imitation of Victorian fiction” that was nonetheless “remarkably satisfying.”

Not all reviewers were as pleased. Jonathan Keates of *The New Review*, after reading the work, felt “irritated at having to endure a drenching from a mixture of archly self-conscious detachment, toe-curling patronage, and a set of opinions, stated or implied, on the Victorians which I didn’t share.” Some critics saw the virtues of the book in comparison to his later works. Denis Donoghue, in a negative review of *Daniel Martin* for the *New York Review of Books*, notes that “*The French Lieutenant’s Woman* is Fowles’s best work because he found for that occasion a major theme of great historical and personal importance, and he commanded a language at least adequate.”

### Responses to Literature

1. Read *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*. What are the gender role expectations for Victorian women? What are the gender role expectations for Victorian men?
2. Besides using narrative shifts in many of his novels, such as in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, Fowles offers multiple endings. Based on what you discovered about the roles of Victorian men and women, which ending would be most accepted by readers during Victorian times? Which ending do you think would be best received by audiences today? Can you think of an even more updated ending? If the book were updated, what would Sarah’s role be as a woman? Would she still be a nanny? Would she take on a secretarial (or administrative assistant) role? Would she be more like a tutor? Why? What would Charles’s role be? Why?

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## Janet Frame

BORN: 1924, Dunedin, New Zealand

DIED: 2004, Dunedin, New Zealand

NATIONALITY: New Zealander

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

*Owls Do Cry* (1957)

*Scented Gardens for the Blind* (1963)

*A State of Siege* (1966)

*Intensive Care* (1970)

*The Envoy from the Mirror City: An Autobiography* (1985)

*The Carpathians* (1988)

### Overview

Janet Frame was one of New Zealand’s most well known contemporary fiction writers. She published eleven novels and several stories and poems, many of which are set in her native country. Frame is not only often acknowledged



Janet Frame Frame, Janet, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

as New Zealand's greatest novelist but is internationally famous—noted not only for her use of material from her years spent in a mental institution, but also for her complex writing style.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Difficult Childhood** Janet Paterson Frame was born on August 28, 1924, in Dunedin, New Zealand, the fourth child of railway engineer George Samuel and Lottie Clarice (née Godfrey) Frame, a former housemaid in the home of writer Katherine Mansfield. Frame began writing as a child in an effort to liberate herself from what she termed “a background of poverty, drunkenness, attempted murder, and near-madness.” During the Depression (a worldwide economic downturn in the 1930s caused by economic crises in Europe and the United States, among other factors), her large family scraped out a living in a rural area of New Zealand and suffered several tragedies. Two of her sisters, Myrtle and Isabel, drowned in separate incidents, and her younger brother George suffered many seizures from epilepsy.

**Writing as Genuine Life Saver** Though she wanted to be a writer, Frame began training to become a teacher at the Dunedin College of Education and aud-

ited courses at the University of Otago in 1943. Soon after entering college, Frame suffered from emotional issues. She began weekly therapy sessions, but while practice-teaching in Dunedin in 1947, a breakdown ensued. As a school inspector arrived to visit her classroom, Frame exploded and bolted from the room.

Her breakdown required psychiatric treatment at Seacliff Mental Hospital, north of Dunedin. Frame was diagnosed with schizophrenia (a psychotic disorder marked by severely impaired thinking, emotions, and behaviors), and her teaching career ended. Although she endured several years of institutionalization and electroconvulsive therapy (applying electrical charges directly to the brain)—both common treatments of psychotic and psychiatric conditions at this time—she continued to write and published her first book of short stories, *The Lagoon* (1951). At the same time that Frame was scheduled to undergo a frontal lobotomy (the removal of part or the whole of the brain's frontal lobe as a means of curing certain mental illnesses, a somewhat commonly used treatment at the time), the book was awarded the Hubert Church Memorial Award. This prize was at that time one of the nation's most prestigious literary honors, and it is said to have resulted in the cancellation of her lobotomy. As Frame would later claim, writing saved her life.

**Autobiographical Successes** Upon being discharged from the hospital, Frame went to live with her sister and family in Northcote in Auckland. There, she met New Zealand author Frank Sargeson. That same year, Frame moved into an old army shack on Sargeson's Takapuna property, where she wrote her first novel, *Owls Do Cry* (1957), which won the New Zealand Literary Fund Award in 1960. Frame then left New Zealand and moved to Europe to develop her talents as a writer. While abroad, she published several stories about her experiences in a psychiatric hospital, including *Faces in the Water* (1961).

Frame returned to New Zealand in 1963. In 1964, she was granted a New Zealand Scholarship in Letters and in 1965, a Robert Burns fellowship from Otago University. As her success flourished over the next several years, Frame continued to earn awards and traveled to the United States and England.

Much of Frame's fiction contains autobiographical elements, but it was not until the publication of her three-volume autobiography in the 1980s that Frame revealed the details of her family life and the eight years she spent in and out of mental hospitals. *To the Is-Land* (1982) traces Frame's poverty-stricken childhood in New Zealand and investigates some of the incidents that later led to a series of nervous breakdowns. In the second installment, *An Angel at My Table* (1984), Frame recounted her experiences as a student at a teacher's training college and the events that caused her to flee



from the assignment when the inspector entered her class to observe her lesson.

Frame continued to garner critical acclaim with her subsequent novels, most notably her last book, *The Carpathians* (1988), which won a Commonwealth Literary Prize in 1989. She died of myeloid leukemia on January 29, 2004, in Dunedin. Another novel of Frame's was published posthumously, *Towards Another Summer* (2007). This short autobiographical novel was so personal that she would not publish it while she was alive, a metaphysical meditation on the nature of "home."

## Works in Literary Context

***Influences of Society, Failed Communication, and Madness*** Frame's work is complex and not easily accessible. It is also as rewarding as it is challenging, as it imaginatively attacks larger issues of memory as fiction, language as deceptive, and women as vehicles for silence in a largely patriarchal world. Regarding Frame's work and its treatment of memory, there has been much debate over whether her autobiographical work is mostly fiction and whether her fiction is mostly autobiographical. Along with her reluctance to allow her life to be categorically described and dissected by critics, Frame readily acknowledged that autobiography itself is a fiction. Her own memory was affected by the many electroshock therapy treatments she received during her eight years in mental institutions, affecting her ability to truly write autobiographically. Even the clearest memory cannot be rendered precisely within the limits of language, as her characters often illustrate.

***Difficulty of Communication*** Through her characters, Frame addresses the problem of language as an inept mode of communication. Many of her characters have difficulty relating to others through words. For example, in *Scented Gardens for the Blind* (1963), narrator Vera Glace is tortured by the speechlessness of her daughter, Erlene. In *The Carpathians*, New Yorker Mattina Brecon attempts to get to know her neighbors on Kowhai Street, where she has taken up temporary residence in order to research the Memory Flower, for which the town is famous. One night she awakens to find her neighbors screaming without human language, covered by a midnight rain of glittering specks that are the ashes of language: letters and punctuation marks. The townspeople mysteriously disappear, Mattina and Kowhai Street are left deserted, and no words can explain exactly why. In such novels, Frame frequently uses figurative language in an effort to depict the ways in which people communicate—or fail to.

***Themes of Dysfunction, Difference, and Madness*** Much of Frame's fiction is marked by concerns with death, poverty, and madness—conditions with which she became familiar while growing up during the Depression, and later when she spent so many years institution-

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Frame's famous contemporaries include:

**Heinrich Böll** (1917–1985): Böll was a German author respected for his post–World War II writings, including *Billiards at Half-Past Nine* (1959), and for his successful resistance to joining Hitler's Youth.

**Ella Fitzgerald** (1917–1996): Fitzgerald was an African American vocalist dubbed the First Lady of Song. She is considered one of the most influential jazz singers of the twentieth century.

**Sylvia Plath** (1932–1963): Plath was an American poet and novelist. She explored her obsessions with death, self, and nature in works that expressed her ambivalent attitudes toward the universe, as seen in *The Collected Poems* (1981).

**Doris Lessing** (1919–): Lessing is an English author. She is perhaps best known for her novel *The Golden Notebook* (1962). Lessing won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2007.

**John Updike** (1932–): Updike is an American novelist, essayist, and literary critic. He is often appreciated for his in-depth chronicling of American psychological, social, and political cultures in his novels of the "Rabbit" series (1960–2001).

alized. *Owls Do Cry* concerns a woman struggling to survive in a psychiatric hospital. *Intensive Care* (1970) is a story about the creation of legislation that would rid the world of misfits. *Scented Gardens for the Blind* is an allegorical tale about the possible atomic destruction of Britain. In such works, Frame explores misconceptions about insanity by juxtaposing madness and fantasy with reality.

***Social Inequities*** Frame's writing also addresses the social inequities of people who are perceived as being psychologically, physically, or intellectually inferior by those possessing political power. Her writing is, for instance, often woman-centered. Reflecting the woman-negating influences of a patriarchal world, her main characters are usually females who have been silenced or who have protected themselves through silence. Their language moves within this silence and either serves as companion or executioner.

***Empowerment*** The bridging of worlds for the sake of empowerment is central to Frame's work. Though her novels usually stop short of actually empowering her characters, there is the persistent yearning for communication and the idea of acceptance as potential cure. Society, with its limited language, views anyone outside the tight circle of prescribed roles as deviant. Frame's



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Frame's writing reflects her concerns for destructive familial relationships as well as the consequences of miscommunication between individuals and societies. Here are a few works by writers who also considered themes of family or social disturbance, inequality, and power struggle:

*Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956), a play by Eugene O'Neill. In this modern drama, an excruciatingly close focus is put on the dysfunctional Tyrone family.

*Once Were Warriors* (1990), a novel by Alan Duff. In this novel, Maori cultural struggles are closely examined in the setting of urban New Zealand by way of the impoverished, undereducated Heke family.

*One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), a novel by Ken Kesey. In this cult classic, the mental institution is changed forever when rebellious parolee Randle McMurphy is admitted.

*Song of Solomon* (1977), a novel by Toni Morrison. This contemporary novel features Milkman, Macon, and Pilate Dead, and focuses on the dynamics of the southern African American family.

*True West* (1980), a play by Sam Shepard. The theme of dysfunctional family dynamics is played out to the hilt in this drama with a Western backdrop.

characters, chained to society by both language and thought, can only attempt to define their own boundaries in society. Despite their frustration and failure at communication, these characters can be thought of as heroic. They strive to find a balance between their individualism and societal norms and eventually come into their own.

### Works in Critical Context

Many of Frame's novels are generally regarded as disturbing and powerful. Equally significant is how critics have ranged in their responses from struggling to comprehend Frame's work to praising it with much applause. Several, for instance, have commented on how difficult Frame's novels can be to interpret. Narrators cannot be assumed to be truthful, and events cannot necessarily be taken as fact. Others have praised the lyrical, complex language and word games Frame employs in her fiction. The names of her characters, for example, are frequently symbolic, like Thera Pattern in *The Edge of the Alphabet* (1962), Vera Glace in *Scented Gardens for the Blind*, and Malfred Signal in *A State of Siege* (1966). Still other critics have dismissed these tactics as a distraction from her thematic intentions.

***The Carpathians*** *The Carpathians* was Frame's last book and is the subject of much critical review. The story

takes place in the fictional town of Puamahara, New Zealand, where a local legend purports that a young Maori woman gained unusual knowledge of human history after tasting the fruit of an unknown tree. Mattina Breton, a wealthy New Yorker, travels to New Zealand to learn the source of the folktale from Puamahara's eccentric residents and becomes fascinated by reports of the Gravity Star, an astral phenomenon that—if real—would challenge common perceptions of time and space and destroy the world.

Some critics have faulted *The Carpathians* for complex and interrelated elements of reality and fantasy and several conscious shifts in point of view. They have found the novel to be overburdened with difficult ideas. However, others have lauded Frame for her exploration of the relationships between language, conformity, and the mysteries of time and space. Jayne Pilling commented in the *Times Literary Supplement*, "As so often in Frame's novels, there's a curious, combustible mix of modes at work here. . . . Yet its possibilities are so rich that Frame needs several different narratives, Chinese-box style, to contain them."

### Responses to Literature

1. Frame's novels explore how New Zealanders struggle with their identity, trying to fit into a country with Maori traditions. After reading one of Frame's works, write a brief essay that explains how Frame views cultural identity.
2. Read *Faces on the Water* and hold a class discussion about Frame's experiences with a mental disorder. Discuss how her personal experience had such a strong impact on her writing.
3. Frame claimed writing saved her life when her book of short stories, *The Lagoon*, won the Hubert Church Memorial Award and averted her scheduled lobotomy. After reading the stories, work in a small group and prepare a statement that explains why these stories are worthy of such accolades.
4. Frame did not agree to many interviews. Imagine that Ms. Frame is still alive and that you have been granted a rare opportunity to interview her. What questions would you ask? Why?

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## ■ Anatole France

BORN: 1844, Paris, France

DIED: 1924, Tours, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard* (1881)

"Crainquebille" (1901)

*Penguin Island* (1908)

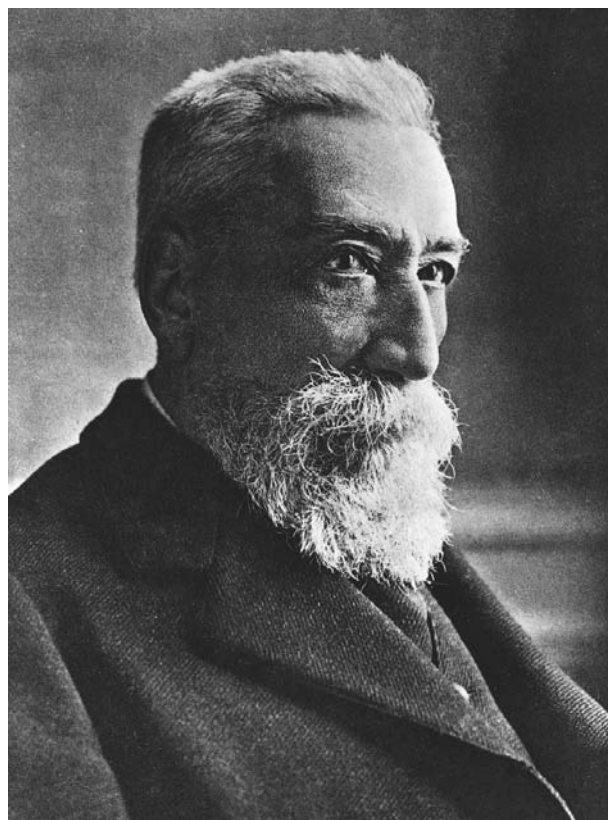
*The Red Lily* (1910)

### Overview

During his lifetime, French author Anatole France, was widely recognized as his country's greatest author. He distinguished himself in two widely diverse areas of literature—wistful storytelling and biting satire—and gained immense popularity with such works as *My Friend's Book* (1885). After his death, France's reputation suffered a marked decline and is at present undergoing reevaluation.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Youth in the Second Empire** Anatole France was born Jacques Anatole François Thibault in Paris on April 16, 1844, the son of a self-educated bookseller. When France was only four, his country underwent yet another in a series of political transformation. The monarchy of Louis Philippe began seeing events of violent opposition



Anatole France France, Anatole, photograph. The Library of Congress.

in Paris in 1848 that eventually resulted in his removal in favor of Louis Napoléon Bonaparte, who served as president of the Second Republic until 1852. This Bonaparte then declared himself Napoléon III and ruled France as emperor until 1871. The period of his rule is known as the Second Empire.

France enjoyed average success during two years at preparatory school in St. Mary's Institute, but his next seven years at the senior school, the famous College Stanislas secondary school, were painful. His diary and the comments of his Jesuit masters reveal the youth's sense of inferiority, which led to indifference, carelessness, and outright neglect of schoolwork. Greater intellectual profit came to him from browsing among his father's books and from friendships with influential customers. The most crucial influence on the impressionable youth was one of his father's regular clients, Count Dubois-Dubais, an ardent classicist and admirer of the past whose wealth allowed him to develop and indulge his taste for finer things. The older man's easy, carefree lifestyle appealed to young France.

**Took up Literary Life** During his late teens and early twenties, France was confronted with the necessity and the uncertainties of choosing a career, though he had the luxury of living at a time when his country was

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

France's famous contemporaries include:

**Robert Peary** (1856–1920): Peary was an American explorer. In a series of expeditions around the turn of the twentieth century, Peary claimed to be the first person to have reached the geographic North Pole.

**Henry Ford** (1863–1947): Ford was an American industrialist and founder of the Ford Motor Company. He pioneered practices, from the assembly line to the institution of the eight-hour workday, that revolutionized industry.

**Georges Clemenceau** (1841–1929): Clemenceau was a French statesman. He served twice as prime minister, including during the latter half of World War I.

**Émile Zola** (1840–1902): Zola was a journalist, critic, social activist, playwright, and novelist. He was highly influential among his fellow Naturalist writers and in liberalizing French politics. His article “J’accuse!” (“I accuse!”) condemning the anti-Semitic “Dreyfuss affair” was a landmark event in European politics.

**Paul Verlaine** (1844–1896): Verlaine was a French poet noted for his contribution to the French Symbolists. He believed the function of poetry was to evoke and not describe.

experiencing great material prosperity as well as colonial expansion. For a time, he had to be content with odd jobs. France assisted his father, worked as a teacher, and worked for a publisher at Bachelin-Deflorenne. Encouraged by his success, he applied unsuccessfully for the post of assistant librarian at the Senate Library. A few months later, in 1866, the sale of the family business made France's search for security more urgent, and he found the courage to approach the young publisher, Alphonse Lemerre, who promptly hired him as an editor and manuscript reader. In his new position, France came in contact with the Parnasse poets, who comprised an anti-Romantic, art-for-art's-sake literary movement during the mid-nineteenth century.

By the mid-1870s France had not yet published any fiction, but he was well known in several Parisian literary circles. To augment his small writing income (mostly from prefaces, encyclopedia articles, and ghost work for Lemerre), which often left him dependent upon his parents for lodging, he finally obtained employment in 1876 at the library of the Senate. It had been only a year since the French Third Republic had been declared, which saw the separation of church and state as well as complete freedoms of the press, speech, and association implemented. In 1877, France married Valérie Guérin de

Sauville, with whom he had one daughter before an 1893 divorce.

**Published First Novels** France began his fiction career with novels and stories of a highly conservative, conventional nature. His first critical and popular success came with *The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard* (1881). The protagonist, a reclusive scholar unsuited to worldly dealings, was the first of many similar characters, who were to some extent based on France himself. Similar characters included Jean Servien from *The Aspirations of Jean Servien* (1882) and Jerome Coignard from *The Queen Pedagogue*. As his fame grew, he began to treat more controversial themes with an increased tendency toward passion and love, as evidenced in *The Red Lily* (1894), and the stories in *Balthazar* (1889), works which illustrate France's view of the church and social reform.

The writing of the four-novel series “L’histoire contemporaine” spanned a period of great change for France. Until this time, France had never aligned himself with any political cause. However, during the composition of the third novel in the series, *The Amethyst Ring*, France became for the first time in his life actively involved with a social cause—the Dreyfus Affair.

**Politically Active** In 1894, Captain Alfred Dreyfus was convicted of treason and subsequently condemned to deportation to Devil's Island, a small island located off the coast of French Guiana that was used as a brutal penal colony. The public had no reason to doubt the justice of the sentence, but in the following years, evidence emerged that cast doubt on the captain's guilt as well as on the propriety of the government's conduct in the matter. In a November 1897 interview, France said he could not approve of the verdict, since he had not been able to examine the evidence. After writer Émile Zola published his famous open letter, “J’accuse,” in the January 13, 1898, *Aurore* to condemn the sentence, he was charged with defamation. France signed the “Pétition des intellectuels” in Zola's support the next day and then testified at his trial.

France's new involvement was reflected in the covert political and legal systems that became a recurring theme in his writing. The short story “Crainquebille” is probably France's most well-known indictment of judicial injustice. As he grew in social awareness, satire became one of France's chief literary tools, of which he made increasing use in such later novels as *Penguin Island* (1909), *The Gods Are Athirst* (1913), and *The Revolt of the Angels* (1914). In France's later years, he was increasingly involved politically with the extreme left and for a time became a supporter of the French Communist Party, as did many intellectuals and artists of this period who generally stood in opposition to World War I. In 1921, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He published his last book the following year, the novel *The Bloom of Life* (1922). France died six months after his eightieth birthday, in 1924.

## Works in Literary Context

The work of Anatole France is characterized by urbanity, wit, taste, craftsmanship, astuteness, and rationalism. Not without reason was he called “The Master,” both in his own time and often in the large body of criticism that appeared after his death. However, France’s elegant style and subtle humor have not secured for him the same kind of enduring reputation enjoyed by his more revolutionary or politically involved contemporaries. To some, his work appears dated and sentimental. He wrote during a major change in the arts and literature, when old Europe was giving way to a vastly new and different modern Europe. To his contemporaries, however, France was a modern writer with the bravery to write biting, even shocking, satires of major cultural institutions.

**Rationalism and Skepticism** France adopted reason, in the French tradition, with a goodly dose of skepticism as a guide to living and thinking. He considered himself a rationalist. Rationalism is a school of thought in which human reason is considered the arbiter of truth. France was careful, though, to avoid giving human reason more credit that it deserved. Though France was scornful of religious dogma, he was nearly as suspicious of the dogmatic claims of science. Thus, France was also a skeptic, meaning he had a disposition to doubt that truth could ever be ascertained about certain things.

## Works in Critical Context

While France received lavish praise from critics during his lifetime, he was ignored or disparaged after his death. The nostalgic sentiment of his early work appealed to fewer critical readers than it once had, and the social and political issues that inspired his satires are now primarily of historical interest. In the 1980s, a significant number of critics have offered favorable rereadings of his works. Critics who have reevaluated France have found a new and more complex appreciation for the artistic qualities of his fiction and his sophisticated handling of literary forms.

In 1897, the year before the first collection of France’s *Selected Texts* appeared, Charles-Louis Philippe had written: “Anatole France is delightful, he knows everything, he’s even erudite; that’s why he belongs to a species of writers that is ending.” In 1916, André Gide had remarked that France’s work, while elegant and subtle, was “without anxiety”—too clear, too easily understood, never disturbing his readers. Yet in 1921, when France was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, Erik Axel Karlfeldt, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, praised both the substance and style of France’s writings as worthy of his great predecessors, including François Rabelais and Voltaire, and called the new laureate the last of the great classicists and the most authoritative contemporary representative of French civilization.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Whether it was religion or science, France always demonstrated a certain amount of skepticism. Other works in a similar skeptical vein include:

*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), a novel by Mark Twain. Consistently named as one of the Great American Novels, Twain’s most popular work takes satirical aim at institutionalized racism, religion, and society in general.

*Babbitt* (1922), a novel by Sinclair Lewis. A scathing look at conformity in the American middle class and, as Lewis calls it, “boosterism,” the act of promoting your town’s outward appearance.

*Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), a film directed by Stanley Kubrick. Loosely based on the Cold War thriller *Red Alert* (1958), by Peter George, this black comedy skewers the contemporary military mindset and the doctrine of “mutual assured destruction.”

***The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard*** One work for which France received praise during his lifetime was *The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard*. Reviewing the book in 1890 in his introduction to an English translation, Lafcadio Hearn wrote, “The author of *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard* is not classifiable,—though it would be difficult to name any other modern French writer by whom the finer emotions have been touched with equal delicacy and sympathetic exquisiteness.” Similarly, the *Nation* stated in 1885 that the book “revealed to the world five or six years ago that M. Anatole France, besides being a savant, was a poet with a fine and rare fancy, and above all a tender and sympathetic heart.”

## Responses to Literature

1. Discuss France’s contributions to French literature.
2. Write a short essay in which you describe France’s use of satire in his apparently straightforward stories.
3. As a class, justify why France won the Nobel Prize in 1921 despite the fact that his literary reputation was already in decline.
4. What themes in France’s work make his writing uniquely “French”? Do you think these themes helped fuel his popularity during his life? How might they have affected his marginalization after he died? Create a presentation of your findings.

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## Dick Francis

BORN: 1920, Coedcanlas, Tenby, Wales

NATIONALITY: British, Welsh

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Sport of Queens* (1957)

*For Kicks* (1965)

*Rat Race* (1970)

*Come to Grief* (1995)

### Overview

The name Dick Francis is synonymous with thrillers and horse racing. A former steeplechase champion, Francis



Dick Francis Francis, Dick, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

has used his thorough knowledge of the “sport of kings” as the basis for almost all of the thirty-odd novels he has produced since 1962. His novels have been translated into nearly two dozen languages and have sold more than 20 million copies. Although his stories generally follow a formula, the character development, sharply observed details and lean, fluid prose raise his best work to the status of literature. His dialogue captures the nuances of social class as he throws together the echelons of equine sports: owners, trainers, jockeys, stable lads, bookmakers, and touts (people who gather information about racehorses and sell it to bettors). Both entertaining and masterful, Francis’s novels fuse the best in the American detective genre and the European murder mystery.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

*Dreams of Being a Jockey* Richard Stanley Francis was born on October 31, 1920, at Coedcanlas, his maternal grandfather’s farm near Tenby, Pembrokeshire, Wales. His father, George Vincent Francis, a professional steeplechase jockey before World War I, became the manager of W. J. Smith’s stables at Holyport, near Maidenhead.



Francis learned to ride at age five and showed horses at age twelve. He vowed at age fifteen to become a professional jockey and helped race, train, transport, and show horses for his father, first at Holyport, then at the family stables near Wokingham. During World War II, he flew fighter planes, troop-carrying gliders, and Wellington bombers for the Royal Air Force. After the war, Francis returned to racing, first as an amateur (tacitly taking under-the-table “gifts” from grateful owners), then as a professional. The conflict he experienced firsthand between amateurs and professionals in the world of horseracing is the source for much of the tension found in many of his novels.

***Mystery Leads to Mystery*** Francis first came to the public eye as a victim in one of the most unusual sports mishaps of the century. In the British Grand National steeplechase, considered by many to be the world’s most prestigious horse racing event, Francis was riding Devon Loch, the Queen Mother’s horse. Having just cleared the last jump, Francis was headed toward victory at the finish post when the horse suddenly and inexplicably collapsed. Francis never discovered what had startled his horse, but that single event turned into a triumph grander than the seasoned jockey could ever have imagined: The accident actually marked the beginning of his writing career.

A literary agent’s continued interest in Francis’s perspective of the race led him to write his autobiography. “The one good thing about an autobiography as a first introduction to writing is that at least you don’t have to research the subject: the story is all there in your own head,” Francis stated in *The Sport of Queens*. In 1957, the same year the work was published, Francis retired as a jockey and began covering horseracing for London’s *Sunday Express*.

Economic necessity, more than anything else, led Francis to try his hand at fiction writing. The mystery surrounding his loss at the Grand National seemed a natural inspiration for a mystery—but this time, it was one he could solve. His debut novel, *Dead Cert*, sold well enough for him to consider writing another one. Since 1964, with the appearance of his second novel, Francis’s fans have been able to read a new novel by their favorite author each year. Rather than looking for Francis in the winner’s circle at the racetrack, his fans on both sides of the Atlantic know to find him on the bestseller lists.

### Works in Literary Context

Francis had long been a devotee of detective fiction. As a child, he read Arthur Conan Doyle, Nat Gould (a pre-World War I English racing writer), and Edgar Wallace. As he grew older, he read authors such as Alistair MacLean, Desmond Bagley, Gavin Lyall, and Michael Underwood. A meticulous researcher, Francis has taken the best of his predecessors and improved upon them to create his nearly forty books.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Francis’s famous contemporaries include:

**Edogawa Rampo** (1894–1965): Rampo, an admirer of western mystery writers, was Japan’s first modern mystery writer and the founder of the Detective Story Club in Japan.

**Frederick Busch** (1941–2006): A prolific American writer, Busch’s work delved into nontraditional detective stories.

**Dashiell Hammett** (1894–1961): With his lean prose style and cynical detective character, Hammett effectively invented hard-boiled detective fiction.

**Cary Grant** (1904–1986): This English actor performed in a multitude of films over his long career, including movies as diverse as lighthearted comedies, musicals, and Alfred Hitchcock thrillers.

**Ellis Parker** (1871–1940): Parker was the “American Sherlock Holmes” who solved 98 percent of the murders he pursued; however, Parker himself violated the law in pursuit of the truth about the kidnapping of Charles Lindbergh’s baby and died in prison.

**Alfred Hitchcock** (1899–1980): A master of cinematic suspense, Hitchcock gained international recognition for his intricate plots, insight into human psychology, and unique camera techniques.

***Classic and Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction*** Paving the way for what is known as the Golden Age of classic detective fiction, *The Moonstone*, by Wilkie Collins, is usually regarded as the prototype for the full-length detective novel in England. Characteristics of the classic form include:

- an unquestionably upright, genteel hero of sound principles;
- offstage deaths that distance the reader from violence;
- an objective search for a pattern of clues amid red herrings;
- a carefully reasoned elimination of suspects with a personal motivation for seeking justice.

Partly in response to the rising crime and gangster activity caused by Prohibition and the Great Depression, the American school of hard-boiled detective fiction began to replace the classic British form. The hard-boiled detective novel differs from the classic in several ways:

- The main character is a tough, cynical, down-to-earth detective who is capable of violence and mistrusted by the police.



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Human beings want to view society as being controlled by justice. Literary and artistic traditions exemplify the struggle humans have experienced in trying to determine whether society and, indeed, the world itself, is so ordered. Francis's work generally suggests that justice will triumph in the end, but others have questioned whether that is so. Here are some pieces that analyze the role justice plays in the world:

*The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844), a novel by Alexander Dumas. In this novel, protagonist Edmond Dantès is falsely accused and convicted of treason; after spending years in prison for the crime, he eventually escapes and exacts his own vigilante justice upon those who conspired against him.

*A Stout Cord and a Good Drop* (2006), a novel by James Gaitis. Gaitis's historical fiction is based on the facts associated with the Montana Vigilantes group, the infamous Montana hanging spree of 1863–64, and the establishment of the Montana Territory during the Civil War.

*The Virginian* (1902), a novel by Owen Wister. Wister first introduces the idea of frontier justice in this American Western novel.

*Without Remorse* (1993), a novel by Tom Clancy. A former Navy SEAL (sea, air, land team) systematically eliminates a gang of drug dealers.

The ability to reasonably solve a murder is secondary to the capability to fight one's way out of dangerous situations.

Murder takes place around the protagonist on an ongoing basis.

The search for a criminal involves questions of loyalty and personal betrayal and ends with personal solutions.

The story culminates with a physical confrontation between investigator and criminal.

Francis's skill in merging the best of the classical and the hard-boiled detective fiction traditions is a large part of what gives the Francis adventure novel its power and appeal. Francis surpasses his predecessors by building on both English and American detective traditions in his focus on vigilante justice. His approach to justice differs from the more conventional form seen in detective traditions in which the "bad guy gets what's coming to him" by means of the justice system.

**Legacy** It is difficult to assess the legacy of a writer who is still working, but in terms of Francis's tweaking of the traditional detective form, it is clear that the same vigilante approach to justice appears in graphic novels such as

*Sin City*, novels in which lone figures mete out justice according to the misdeeds of criminals. In fact, graphic novels often show an affinity for different forms of literature, from detective fiction to more traditional classical literature, including Shakespeare's. Both Francis and graphic novelists attempt to be equally thrilling and thought-provoking, often proposing answers to the question, How should we live?

## Works in Critical Context

How could a steeplechase jockey become such a popular writer? By way of explanation, John Mortimer noted in the *New York Times Book Review*, "What he brought with him from the race track were the crowd-pulling powers of suspense, surprise and the shared enthusiasm to discover who's going to win." Perhaps his best trait is the diversity in character and plot he purposefully brings to his writings. "Despite his standard approach," writes Gina Macdonald in *Concise Dictionary of British Literary Biography*, "Francis's works are never the same. His plots remain fresh, unexpected, solid. They move forward briskly, with an admirable sense of timing, and are lent variety by his interweaving of racing and other concerns." Remarkably, he has managed to continue a five-decade-long writing career with no noticeable slumps. "The author's notes for Mr. Francis's books often observe that as a jockey he rode for the Queen Mother," Elizabeth Tallent observed in the *New York Times Book Review*. "At this point in his illustrious writing career," the critic continued, "the Queen Mother might wish to note in her *vita* that the writer Dick Francis once rode for her."

**Francis's Horse Racing Subculture** Francis has used his horse racing background to give him the framework for his fictional material. Sometimes his novels focus on the racing world, and sometimes the horses are kept in the background, as a side note to add color to the story. Reviewers have noted, however, that even those readers not interested in horseracing can find something to love in a Francis mystery. In the *New York Times*, John Leonard noted, "Not to read Dick Francis because you don't like horses is like not reading [Fyodor] Dostoyevsky because you don't like God. Baseball, boarding houses, racetracks and God are subcultures. A writer has to have a subculture to stand on." Critics agree that Francis adeptly describes his own subculture with a realism that does not detract from the storyline.

In a *New York Times Book Review* critique of Francis's third novel, *For Kicks*, published in 1965, Anthony Boucher wrote, "The background of life among horses and trainers and stable lads (and criminals) is so real you can smell and taste it." In a *London Magazine* review of Francis's 1979 thriller, *Whip Hand*, John Welcome observed, "Francis can make a race come alive off his pages in thrilling fashion. One can hear the smash of birch, the creak of leather and the rattle of whips." These two volumes won their author recognition from his

fellow mystery writers: a Silver Dagger award from the British Crime Writers Association for *For Kicks* and a Gold Dagger award from the same organization, as well as an Edgar Award from the Mystery Writers of America, for *Whip Hand*.

**Improving with Age** Writing in the *British Book News*, James Melville called Francis “the author who can truthfully say that his best book is the one most recently published.” Based on critical response, Francis’s most recent books stand up well to Melville’s analysis. In *School Library Journal*, for example, Pam Spencer deemed Francis’s 1991 novel, *Comeback*, full of “the same storytelling magic as always,” and a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor noted that the book showed Francis’s “touch with a story as sure as ever.” “All the action, suspicions, and deaths,” Jim and Janet Mura observed in *Voice of Youth Advocates*, “make for a fast and exciting read.”

## Responses to Literature

1. It is often said that Dick Francis novels are basically detective novels, but that they are not confined by the conventions of detective novels. Read one of Francis’s detective novels and research the conventions of detective novels. Prepare a PowerPoint presentation illustrating elements of detective fiction, both classic and hard-boiled. In what ways does Francis’s work stretch the boundaries of traditional detective novels?
2. Read one of Francis’s earlier novels and one of his most recent. Do you agree with James Melville’s assessment that Francis’s work has only gotten better with age? Why or why not?
3. Both Dick Francis and Norman MacLane began their literary careers later in life. Using the Internet and the library, research the life of Norman MacLane and write a short paper in which you discuss MacLane’s early life and how it affected his writing in comparison to that of Francis’s.

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## Anne Frank

BORN: 1929, Frankfurt, Germany

DIED: 1945, Bergen-Belsen, Germany

NATIONALITY: German, Dutch

GENRE: *Diary, short stories*

MAJOR WORKS:

*Diary of a Young Girl* (1947)

*The Works of Anne Frank* (1959)

## Overview

Anne Frank is known worldwide for the diary she kept while hidden in German-occupied Amsterdam during World War II. For two years, Frank and her family remained stowed away with four other Jews in a few attic rooms above the office where her father worked. Nazi officers discovered their hiding place on August 4, 1944, captured the eight hidden Jews and sent them to concentration camps. Anne Frank died in March 1945, shortly



Anne Frank *Frank, Anne, photograph. The Library of Congress.*

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Frank's famous contemporaries include:

**Norman Mailer** (1923–2007): American writer whose first novel, *The Naked and the Dead*, concerns his army service during World War II.

**Günter Grass** (1927–): German novelist who explored the phenomenon of Nazism.

**Adolf Hitler** (1889–1945): German chancellor and ruler of Nazi Germany from 1933–1945.

**Winston Churchill** (1874–1965): British prime minister during World War II.

**Kurt Vonnegut** (1922–2007): American satirical novelist imprisoned in Germany during World War II.

before her sixteenth birthday. Her journal, published in 1947 as *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl*, candidly describes the experiences and emotions of an ordinary adolescent in extraordinary circumstances. Many people have found her life story inspiring and symbolic of the overwhelming tragedy known as the Holocaust.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Childhood Amid Persecution and War** Annelies Marie “Anne” Frank was born to an upper-class Jewish family in the city of Frankfurt. The early childhood of Frank and her elder sister, Margot, was secure and loving, but the year of Anne’s birth also marked the onset of a worldwide economic depression that affected a great number of Europeans. In Germany, economic disaster, combined with the lingering effects of Germany’s defeat in World War I, led to the installation of Adolf Hitler as leader of the government in 1933. Hitler’s National Socialist (Nazi) party made anti-Semitism official state policy. Following Hitler’s decree that Jewish and non-Jewish children could not attend the same schools, the Franks left their homeland and by 1934 were settled in Amsterdam.

Despite the growing threat of war, Frank lived a normal life, much like any Dutch girl, for the next few years. In many respects, Frank remained absorbed in everyday life even after the Germans invaded Holland in 1940 and imposed harsh anti-Jewish measures. Frank was forced to leave her Montessori school and attend the Jewish Lyceum. As Nazi horrors increased, including the roundup of Amsterdam’s Jews in 1941 for incarceration in concentration camps, Otto Frank and his business partners secretly prepared a hiding place in the top,

back portion of their company’s combined warehouse and office building on Prinsengracht Canal.

In June 1942, Anne celebrated her thirteenth birthday, receiving among her presents a small cloth-bound diary. Several weeks later, Margot Frank was notified to report to the reception center at the Westerbork concentration camp, and the family fled into the secret annex. They were joined by a Mr. and Mrs. Van Pelz (rendered as “Van Daan” in Anne’s diary) and their fifteen-year-old son Peter, and several months later by Albert Dussel, a middle-aged dentist. Together they remained virtually imprisoned for over two years.

**“Life in the Secret Annex”** Anne wrote in the diary until the discovery of the hiding place in August 1944. The diary meant a great deal to her; she viewed it as a personal friend and confidant. In the diary Anne relates the aggravations of life in hiding as well as the experiences of adolescence that are recognized by people everywhere. Lively and vivacious, she was chastised at school for chattering, but in the annex she was forced to whisper throughout the day. It was a great trial for her. After a year of this silence, combined with her confinement, she expressed feelings of depression, writing on October 29, 1943, “The atmosphere is so oppressive and sleepy and as heavy as lead. . . . I wander from one room to another, downstairs and up again, feeling like a songbird whose wings have been clipped and who is hurling himself in utter darkness against the bars of his cage.”

Anne could be headstrong, opinionated, and critical, especially of her mother. Generally cheerful and optimistic, she adored her father and attempted to get along with the others, but she was sensitive to criticism, explaining in her diary that no one criticized her more than she herself. Her special attention was given to a budding puppy love with Peter van Daan. The relationship ended soon because it was difficult to maintain in the confined space of the hiding place and because she had a talk with her father who suggested ending it.

The diary traces her development from an outgoing, popular child to an introspective, idealistic young woman. Frank questioned her own idealism in an often-quoted passage written July 15, 1944: “It’s really a wonder that I haven’t dropped all my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them, because in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart.”

**Discovery by the Nazis and Death** The diary ends on August 1, 1944, three days before the group was arrested and sent to the concentration camp at Auschwitz, Poland. Margot and Anne were later transferred to Bergen-Belsen. According to a survivor who knew her at the concentration camp, Anne never lost her courage and deep sensitivity. Both Anne and Margot died of typhoid fever at Bergen-Belsen in March 1945. Their mother had died earlier at Auschwitz. Otto Frank, liberated from

Auschwitz by Russian troops in 1945, returned to Amsterdam and soon received a letter informing him of his daughters' deaths. Miep Gies, who had helped hide the family, gave Anne's writings to him. Urged by friends, Otto Frank published an edited version of the diary, deleting some passages he thought too personal. After Otto Frank passed away in 1980, more of the Anne Frank archive was opened, and in 1989 *The Diary of Anne Frank: The Critical Edition* brought readers the diary without her father's cuts.

### Works in Literary Context

Initially, Frank considered her diary a private work. Conceiving of the diary as a friend, she named it "Kitty," after a character in a popular series of children's books by the Dutch author Cissy van Marxveldt. She wrote her entries in the form of letters to Kitty. The vivid, poignant entries range in tone from humorous to serious, casual to intense, and reveal Frank's ability to write narrative and descriptive accounts as well as to write about abstract ideas. The diary, often commended for its engaging style, is full of vitality. Meyer Levin has praised the work for sustaining "the tension of a well-constructed novel."

**Personal Narratives** Frank's attitude toward her diary changed in the spring of 1944, when she heard the voice of a minister from the exiled Dutch government on the radio. He was proposing that letters and diaries written during the German occupation be collected, to help future generations understand what the Dutch people had endured. Frank began to copy her entire diary onto loose-leaf paper, editing and revising along the way, with awareness that it could one day be published.

Anne Frank's diary occupies a prominent place in the litany of first-person accounts of danger and hardship, including diaries from soldiers and civilians during other wars, slave narratives and captivity narratives. Indeed, for many young readers, her diary has become the defining document of this genre.

**Coming of Age** *The Diary of Anne Frank* also belongs squarely in the tradition of coming-of-age literature, fictional or factual. Frank can thus lay claim to literary precursors such as Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. In turn, the earnestness of her self-reflection opened the way for the flourishing of coming-of-age novels in the late twentieth century, represented by authors such as J.D. Salinger for adult readers, and Judy Blume and S.E. Hinton for young readers.

During the course of writing the diary, Anne became certain she wanted to be a writer. She envisioned a novel based on her diary. Additionally she wrote stories, later collected in *The Works of Anne Frank and Tales from the House Behind*. According to *New York Times Book Review* critic Frederick Morton, the stories "show that Anne followed instinctively the best of all platitudes: Write whereof

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The Holocaust is one of the most cataclysmic events of modern times, raising urgent questions about the nature of evil and its lasting effects on everyone it touches. The following works relate to these events:

*Night* (1958), by Elie Wiesel. An autobiographical account of life in the Nazi death camps.

*Survival in Auschwitz* (1947), by Primo Levi. The author's first-person account of daily experience in the death camp is told with restraint and dry wit, enabling the reader to grasp the horror of genocide in its full depth.

*Sophie's Choice* (1979), by William Styron. An American writer makes friends with a Jewish man and his lover, Sophie, who gradually reveals her haunting secret.

*Schindler's Ark* (1982), by Thomas Keneally. A novel based on the life of Oskar Schindler, a German businessman who saved more than a thousand Jews from the camps; basis for Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List*.

*Shoah* (1985), a film directed by Claude Lanzmann. This nine-hour documentary film is an oral history of survivors, witnesses, and participants in the everyday activities of the Holocaust.

you know. Not even her little fairy tales are easy escapes into make-believe, but rather pointed allegories of reality.... Still none of these ... has the power of any single entry in the diary."

**A Lasting Impact** Anne Frank's diary proved remarkably popular, selling millions of copies and being translated into many languages. A stage adaptation opened in New York in 1955. Four years later, a major Hollywood motion picture was produced based on the diary. To this day, the diary is routinely assigned to schoolchildren around the world.

### Works in Critical Context

As a historical document the diary is an indictment of the Nazis' destruction of human life and culture. As Ilya Ehrenburg has stated, "One voice speaks for six million—the voice not of a sage or a poet but of an ordinary little girl." Critics have argued that while newsreels and books that explicitly portray Nazi atrocities have had a stupefying effect on people, Frank's story acquaints people with everyday recognizable individuals and has thus been phenomenally effective in communicating this enormous tragedy. In postwar Germany, there was an intense interest in Frank among German youth after years of repressive silence regarding Nazi crimes. Anne Birstein and Alfred Kazin have asserted that "the reality of what certain people have had to endure in our time can be

grasped humanly and politically only because of the modulation of a document like *The Diary of a Young Girl*, which permits us to see certain experiences in a frame, in a thoroughly human setting, so that we can bear them at all.”

Apart from interest in the diary for its historical value, some have admired its accurate, revealing portrait of adolescence. “She described life in the annex, with all its inevitable tensions and quarrels,” wrote L. De Jong in *A Tribute to Anne Frank*. “But she created first and foremost a wonderfully delicate record of adolescence, sketching with complete honesty a young girl’s feelings, her longings and loneliness.” Annie Romein-Vershoor has expressed the view that Frank “possessed the one important characteristic of a great writer: an open mind, untouched by complacency and prejudice.”

## Responses to Literature

1. For what purposes did Anne Frank use her diary? How did the diary’s place in her life evolve over time?
2. After March of 1944, Anne Frank began writing her diary with greater consciousness that it may someday be read. How does this awareness influence her style and the direction her writing takes? Provide several specific examples supporting your main points.
3. Using your library and the Internet, research the European Jewish reaction to the rising power of Adolf Hitler. How many Jews left their homes to find safety? How many hid, as did Anne Frank and her family? Of those, how many were discovered and sent to their deaths? On the other hand, how many stayed, hoping the situation would not get worse? What do you think your family would have done?
4. The 1998 documentary film “Paper Clips,” depicts the story of a high school teacher in a small town in Tennessee. She wanted to open the eyes of her students to a world event that most had never heard of, and, in some way, have those students actually touch that event. The students filled a railcar with 11 million paper clips: one paper clip for each person who died. This railcar now stands as a memorial in this Tennessee schoolyard as a lesson the students will not forget. Now, imagine you are the teacher. Can you create a project that will have your students, or even your friends, connect to Anne Frank’s teen years? What could make it real to you and how would you transmit that reality to your peers?

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## George MacDonald Fraser

BORN: 1925, Carlisle, England

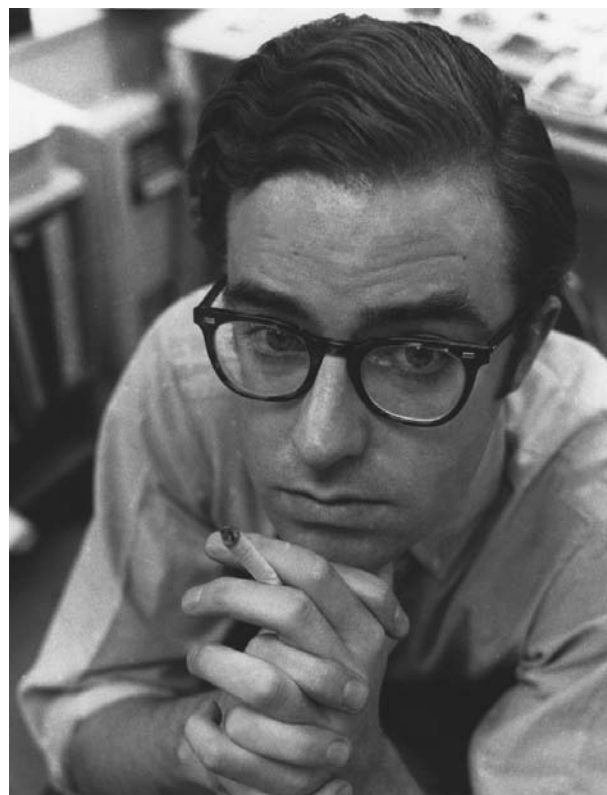
DIED: 2008, Isle of Man (British Crown dependency)

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Flashman: From the Flashman Papers, 1839–1842* (1969)



George Fraser Fraser, George IV, 1968, photograph. AP Images.



*Royal Flash: From the Flashman Papers, 1842–43 and 1847–* (1970)

*Flashman and the Dragon* (1986)

*The General Danced at Dawn* (1970)

*Quartered Safe Out Here: A Harrowing Tale of World War II* (2001)

## Overview

George MacDonald Fraser was more than a novelist—he was also a journalist, soldier, scholar, historian, and writer of screenplays. He is best remembered for his series of satirical *Flashman* novels, centered on a cowardly and mischievous British soldier in the nineteenth century who stumbles his way through history. Fraser also made a successful career in Hollywood, both as a historian of the movies and as a screenwriter for several popular films. Throughout his life and his writing, Fraser has explored exactly what it means to be “heroic” in the modern age.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***From the Son of a Doctor to an Ordinary Soldier*** George MacDonald Fraser was the son of a doctor, born and raised in Carlisle, England, near the border with Scotland. He attended school in both Carlisle and Glasgow, Scotland. In 1943, several years after Germany’s invasion of Poland, which marked the beginning of World War II, Fraser joined the army. During his service, he repeatedly engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the Japanese in the jungles of Burma (now Myanmar). He recounts some of these experiences in his memoir, *Quartered Safe Out Here*, a book widely praised for its view of war from the ordinary soldier’s perspective.

Fraser used his military experiences after the war, including his postings in the Middle East and North Africa, to create three volumes of short stories about the waning days of British colonialism, which began at the end of World War II as most of Europe lay in ruins and even Britain found itself nearing bankruptcy. The stories alternate between comedy and tragedy, and all of them feature Fraser’s character Private McAuslan, “the dirtiest soldier in the world.”

***Life After the Military*** After his discharge from the military, Fraser became a journalist in England and Canada, eventually returning to Glasgow to become an editor at the *Glasgow Herald* in 1953. He left this position when his first novel, *Flashman*, became a hit in 1969. He moved to the Isle of Man, Crown dependency of the United Kingdom, to avoid paying high British taxes, and he remained there for the rest of his life.

***Success in Hollywood*** Fraser’s interest in history led him to write a book about how Hollywood treats histor-

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Fraser’s famous contemporaries include:

**Roald Dahl** (1916–1990): British author known for his children’s books, including *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964).

**Margaret Thatcher** (1925–): Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990.

**Claude Lévi-Strauss** (1908–): The French anthropologist who was an important figure in the development of structuralism, a branch of analysis that focuses on the relationship between interrelated parts of a system as a source of meaning, as it relates to anthropology.

**John Kenneth Galbraith** (1908–2006): An economist who argued that wealthy nations should use their resources to help developing countries deal with poverty for their mutual benefit. He won two Presidential Medals of Freedom, from presidents Harry Truman and Bill Clinton.

ical figures and events, *The Hollywood History of the World: From One Million Years B.C. to Apocalypse Now* (1988). He concludes that the movies do a more responsible job than most people might assume. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Fraser contributed to the movies himself, adapting his novel *Royal Flash* for the screen in 1975. He also wrote the screenplays for several other historical farces, including *The Three Musketeers* (1973) and its sequel *The Four Musketeers* (1974). He also co-wrote one screenplay in the James Bond series: *Octopussy* (1983).

Fraser was awarded the Order of the British Empire in 1999. He continued writing and publishing work into old age. On January 2, 2008, at the age of eighty-two, George Fraser died of cancer. His daughter, Caro Fraser, is a successful writer with a series of novels of her own—legal thrillers set in London’s Caper Court. He is also survived by his wife and two sons.

## Works in Literary Context

Fraser’s most popular creation, Flashman, was inspired by Thomas Hughes’s novel *Tom Brown’s School Days* (1857), which Fraser read as a boy. In Hughes’s novel, a character named Flashman appears as a sadistic bully that torments the novel’s protagonist, Tom. Building on a tradition of authors who publicly conflated fact with fiction, Fraser joined authors like Daniel Defoe who gained popularity after their tales, which were assumed by readers to be true, were revealed to be fiction.

***False Document*** When *Flashman: From the Flashman Papers, 1839–1842* first appeared in 1969, many people



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

An “antihero” should not be confused with a “villain”: The antihero is the protagonist (the center of the reader’s interest and affection, trying to bring about good or order) and the villain is the antagonist (the character trying to stop the protagonist, trying to create crime or chaos). An antihero exhibits qualities such as cowardice or dullness, but still remains the protagonist, sometimes in spite of himself. Here are some other works containing antiheroes.

*Hamlet* (1599–1601), a play by William Shakespeare. The titular character of this tragedy is often considered one of the earliest examples of an antihero in English literature. Though his aims are just, Hamlet is hesitant, skeptical, and self-absorbed. These traits all contribute to his ultimate downfall.

*Don Quixote, Man of La Mancha* (1605), a novel by Miguel de Cervantes. This central book in the canon of Western literature tells of an eccentric Spaniard who cobbles together a suit of armor made of scrap metal and sets out to slay giants and rescue damsels in distress.

*The Maltese Falcon* (1930), a novel by Dashiell Hammett. This classic detective story introduced the character of Sam Spade, a private investigator who does whatever it takes—including working with criminals—to solve his case.

*Blackadder* (1983–1989), a television series written by Rowan Atkinson, Richard Curtis, and Ben Elton. This classic British series is about a vain, cowardly, self-interested, but very smart and witty antihero who appears in various places throughout key moments in British history, from the medieval period through World War I.

assumed it was a true story. It deals with the misadventures of a young British captain in India who always manages to end up the hero while running from danger. Fraser claimed that he had found the manuscript wrapped in oilskins and packed in a tea-chest in the Leicestershire town of Ashby-de-la-Zouch. So many readers believed the account was true that the publisher had to break the story that it was a fake to the *New York Times*. With this publicity, the book became a bestseller.

**Joining the Tradition of Conflating Fiction with Fact** Fraser was certainly not the first author to conflate fiction with fact. When the novel emerged as a popular literary genre in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, it was a child that bore a family resemblance to its various ancestors: travel narratives, sermons, saint’s lives, criminal confessions, spiritual autobiographies, histories, political tracts, professional guides. The first bestselling novel in the history of the genre was

*Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe. That story was told in Crusoe’s voice, the real author’s name appears nowhere in the book, and there is enough realistic detail for it to be taken as fact.

**Satire of Victorian Figures and Society** The eleven sequels to the original *Flashman* novel abandon the factual premise in favor of satire and comedy, as the protagonist travels to virtually every notable location and meets nearly every important person in the second half of the nineteenth century: Benjamin Disraeli, Arthur Wellesley Wellington, Otto von Bismarck, Queen Victoria, Abraham Lincoln, and others. The main character’s selfishness and eye for the ladies get him into tricky situations, but he always weasels out of them through his charm, wit, and knack for making a quick getaway. Fraser was writing these *Flashman* novels in the mid-1960s when straightforward and heroic historical fiction was no longer in style. One of Fraser’s literary contributions was to fuse the old Victorian novel with the new cynical, sardonic, and witty satires of the 1960s.

## Works in Critical Context

Fraser’s novels, notes W. Keith Kraus of *Best Sellers*, are “the continuing story of Harry Flashman, a nineteenth-century rogue who zoomed to stardom in a first volume over the bodies of a few thousand Afghans . . . and a handful of reviewers.” Other *Flashman* books feature the hero in various historical settings. In *Flashman and the Redskins*, for instance, Flashman travels to the United States and tries to persuade President Ulysses S. Grant to give General George Armstrong Custer his job back. Jonathan Yardley, in *Washington Post Book World*, finds this adventure, though not “quite as hilarious as promised in the promotional material,” still “consistently entertaining” and “eminently satisfying.” Jack Kapica, of the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, considering the hero’s exploits in *Flashman and the Dragon* less predictable than the previous *Flashman* books, declares that “there is a more mature hand at work here, and one that is oddly even more satisfying.”

Of the *Flashman* books in general, a writer for the *London Times* writes, “It was all rollicking nonsense; but it had a sterling quality that went to the heart of many sophisticated readers who like to relax with a rubbishy book provided it is well written rubbish. Fraser was a thoroughly professional literary craftsman.”

Objections to Fraser’s writing are often politically based. It is not always clear when racist and sexist attitudes regularly appear in the *Flashman* novels because of their nineteenth-century setting, or because they are shared by Fraser. As Fraser himself once said of Flashman, “If he wasn’t an elitist, racist swine, I’d be selling bootlaces at street corners instead of being a successful popular writer.” The *London Times* obituary for Fraser reads,

"Through it all, sabres glint in the sunlight and the white man comes out top in the end; bosoms heave, bodices are ripped; foreigners strut and sneer and simper and generally prove their inferiority. Part of the delight of the stories, when they appeared in an age of women's liberation and campaigns against racial discrimination, was the shameless way Fraser ignored political correctness." Others have been less delighted. A reviewer of *Flashman and the Angel of the Lord* says that the novel's "ignorant, extremist, symbolic political violence... is ultimately uninteresting." In Fraser's memoirs, he is particularly harsh on the changes in Britain under the "New Labour" government of Tony Blair; the appeal of *The Light's on at Signpost* (2002) is likely to be limited to those who already agree with his conservative point of view.

## Responses to Literature

1. Have you ever been tricked into thinking that all or part of a fictional work was true? What was your reaction? What are the benefits and dangers of this as a literary technique?
2. Where do you draw a line between an antihero and a villain? How much can a character "get away with" before you lose sympathy or interest? Do some research on what reviewers have said about Flashman as an antihero, and see if he crosses that line for some of those critics. What do you find most and least appealing about Flashman?
3. Fraser was commissioned to write a screenplay for the James Bond series. Why do you think the producers selected Fraser? What do Bond and Flashman have in common as characters?

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## Michael Frayn

BORN: 1933, London, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Drama, Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Tin Men* (1965)

*Noises Off* (1982)

*Copenhagen* (1998)

*Spies* (1984)

*Democracy* (2002)

## Overview

In his newspaper columns, novels, and plays, Michael Frayn employs satire and farce to explore the complexities and shortcomings of contemporary society. Among his



Michael Frayn Frayn, Michael, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

targets are human foibles, middle-class values, the pitfalls of technology, and those aspects of popular culture that Frayn believes distort reality—including mass media, public relations, and advertising. Although he first established himself as a columnist and novelist, Frayn is probably best known for several acclaimed theatrical works he wrote during the 1970s and 1980s. In these plays, he undertakes a more thorough examination of the relationship between language and reality. He is widely praised for his wit, insight, and ability to unite comedy with serious, philosophical observation.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***A Difficult Child becomes a Reluctant Cold Warrior*** Michael Frayn was born on September 8, 1933, in London, England, to Thomas Allen Frayn, a sales representative for an asbestos company, and Violet Alice Lawson Frayn, a shop assistant. Soon after his birth, which came during the worldwide economic depression that preceded World War II's 1939 start in Europe, Frayn's parents moved to Ewell on the southern fringe of London. Frayn believes his sense of humor began to develop during his years at Kingston Grammar School where, to the delight of classmates, he practiced "techniques of mockery" on his teachers. Referring to this early habit of making jokes at the expense of others, Frayn says, "I sometimes wonder if this isn't an embarrassingly exact paradigm of much that I've done since."

After leaving school in 1952, Frayn was conscripted into the Royal Army and sent to a Russian-interpreter course at Cambridge. He also studied in Moscow for several weeks, returning with the opinion that the so-called Cold War was ridiculous. The Cold War was a decades-long period of tension between purportedly Communist regimes in the Soviet Union and elsewhere in Eastern Europe and Asia and the determinedly capitalist governments of Western Europe and the United States. Such East-West relations would later become a subject of satire in many of Frayn's works. Eventually Frayn was commissioned as an officer in the Intelligence Corps, which certainly influenced his second novel, *The Russian Interpreter*, (1966). Discharged from the army in 1954, he returned to Cambridge to study philosophy at Emmanuel College, University of Cambridge.

***From behind the Stage in Cambridge to behind High Society in Manchester*** At Cambridge, Frayn wrote humorous articles for the undergraduate newspaper. He also collaborated with John Edwards on a musical comedy, *Zounds!*, which was performed in 1957 by the Cambridge theatrical club, the Footlights. After graduation in 1957, Frayn worked for the Manchester *Guardian*, where he was a reporter from 1957 to 1959 and a columnist from 1959 to 1962. His columns of social satire for the *Guardian* soon became very popular and

were collected into two books, *The Day of the Dog* (1962) and *The Book of Fub* (1963). In 1962 he moved to the *Observer* in London, where he continued writing humorous columns until 1968. His work for the *Observer* has also been collected as *On the Outskirts* (1964) and *At Bay in Gear Street* (1967).

***A Novelist Turns to Television*** Frayn's first novel, *The Tin Men* (1965), is a satire on the failure of mere human beings to rise above the level of computers. Naturally, it is in the satirical mold of his newspaper columns. *The Tin Men* won the Somerset Maugham Award, and his second novel, *The Russian Interpreter*, about espionage, won the Hawthornden Prize. Two more satirical novels followed: *Towards the End of the Morning* (1967) and *A Very Private Life* (1968).

Television then offered Frayn a new opportunity to try out his dramatic skills. In 1968 "Jamie on a Flying Visit," a farcical comedy about the collision between the tired inhabitants of a postwar housing estate and a rich visitor from the protagonist's wife's undergraduate past, was broadcast by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). It and "Birthday" (1969), a story about the overriding imperatives of human reproduction, were produced as part of the *Wednesday Play* series.

***Failed Drama Offers the Blueprint for Success*** The encouragement of the producer Michael Codron, who later staged many of Frayn's plays and produced his motion picture *Clockwise* (1986), prompted Frayn to try writing for the theater. His first professional theatrical production, four one-act two-actor plays collectively titled *The Two of Us*, opened on July 30, 1970, at the Garrick Theatre in London. *The Two of Us* was not a success, and Frayn fared little better with his next play, *The Sandboy* (1971).

Frayn, however, did not give up on his drama and went on to write the well-received *Noises Off*, which established his reputation not only as a playwright but also as a supreme writer of farce. A comedy that depends on its parodic borrowings from the worst traditions of the British farce, *Noises Off* traces progress from the last-minute rehearsal and the subsequent run of an awful piece of repertory theater, and the connection between the stage business and the actors' interwoven lives. The idea for the play came initially from Frayn's viewing of his own work, *The Two of Us*, from backstage. He found that viewing the play from that vantage point provided a greater comic experience than observing it from the usual audience perspective.

***Sparkling Career as a Dramatist and Prose-writer*** Frayn's success in theater, however, did not mean a renunciation of his earlier engagement with the novel. He continued writing novels sporadically throughout the 1980s and '90s and into the new century, most recently offering the very successful *Spies* (2002). At the same time, his stage efforts found still greater success,

with the 1998 *Copenhagen* winning a variety of awards, including a prestigious Tony Award for Best Play for its Broadway performances in 2000. *Copenhagen* deals with a mysterious meeting between physicists Neils Bohr (Danish) and Werner Heisenberg (German) in Nazi-occupied Denmark, with Frayn reaching back from the end of the twentieth century to one of the century's most significant and devastating moments: World War II and the development of the atomic bomb. Frayn returned again to Germany for his successful 2002 play *Democracy*, before turning to Austrian theater impresario Max Reinhardt—and his encounter with Nazism—for the 2008 *Afterlife*. He has also published a number of volumes of non-fiction and philosophy, with his latest effort *The Human Touch: Our Part in the Creation of a Universe* (2006) focusing (rather lightly, complain the critics) on what quantum theory and certain trends in cognitive science suggest about the world outside our minds. Frayn lives in London with his wife, well-known biographer and literary critic Claire Tomalin.

### Works in Literary Context

Frayn's work is nearly always satirical in nature. But that satire runs above a deep philosophical undercurrent. Indeed, much of Frayn's work delves into issues of language and meaning, and his philosophical thinking is influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein, a philosopher whose primary focus was on the nature and limitations of language.

**In the Satirical Tradition** Satire seeks to critique a person or practice, usually by exaggerating and laying bare the foibles of the person or the practice. As an example, Jonathon Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* satirizes many aspects of the culture in which he lived, but Swift focused extra energy on scientists. He considered scientists to be overly abstract people whose ideas were far removed from practical implementation. In *Gulliver's Travels*, he portrays scientists as being so absent-minded that they actually have to hire assistants to help them remember to do things like breathe, eat, and go to the bathroom.

Frayn's work, like Swift's, often focuses its satirical gaze on people who are less than fully present in the lives they lead. For instance, *Tin Men* is a satire on the stupidity of people whose procedures are so dull that they can be taken over by computers. Again, in *Mr. Foot*, Frayn satirizes lifeless and loveless marriages. The husband is enshrined as the upholder of a set of suburban values spoofed in the English absurdist tradition, and the wife, who is the mouthpiece of the satire, is thus separated from those values. In *Mr. Foot*, the audience ultimately comes to understand that the life of the wife has been a tragic loss, thereby underscoring the fact that there is something missing in the suburban values Frayn critiques. This suggests, in the process, that there must be a better way to live life.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Frayn's famous contemporaries include:

**Cormac McCarthy** (1933–): An American novelist, many of whose novels, including *No Country for Old Men* and *All the Pretty Horses*, have been adapted into popular films.

**Michael Ondaatje** (1943–): The Sri-Lankan and Canadian novelist who won the Booker Prize for his novel *The English Patient*.

**Bob Marley** (1945–1981): A Jamaican songwriter who promoted peace through his songs. His efforts were recognized when he was awarded the Peace Medal of the Third World from the United Nations.

**Cyprian Ekwensi** (1921–2007): An author who helped to popularize the novel as an art form in his native Nigeria.

**José Saramago** (1922–): The Portuguese novelist honored with the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1998.

**Benazir Bhutto** (1953–2007): The first woman to serve as prime minister of Pakistan. Bhutto was assassinated on December 27, 2007, in her home country.

### Wittgenstein and the Philosophy of Language

Frayn's work is thoroughly infused with philosophical meditations—on everything from the nature of reality to the effects of language. With respect to these philosophical ruminations, Frayn recalls, “The philosopher who entirely dominated the way that philosophy was done and taught at Cambridge, and who had the greatest possible influence on me and everything I’ve written was Wittgenstein.” An Austrian expatriate who spent most of his life in England, Wittgenstein was a leading figure in twentieth-century philosophy. He studied logic under Bertrand Russell at Cambridge and later taught philosophy there until 1947. Wittgenstein's work deals primarily with the nature and limits of language. He discussed the limits of language as a means of interpersonal communication and as a means of representing reality. Words, he said, present a picture of reality but are not reality itself.

To see the influence of Wittgenstein on Frayn's drama, one need only look at Frayn's second play, *The Sandboy*. Its central character is a city planner who is so successful that a documentary film is being made about him. In the play the actors speak to the audience as if it is an imaginary film crew, which is present to record a day in the life of Phil Schaffer, city planner. This unusual dramatic framework places Phil and his wife in the position of having to present a social facade and yet appear natural at the same time, while asking the audience—in a

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

*Noises Off*, Frayn's most popular play, utilizes a technique best described as "play-within-a-play." The play itself is a play, but it is also about a play. The characters in *Noises Off* attempt to perform in another play called *Nothing On*. Here are a few more examples of films and plays that use the "play-within-a-play" strategy:

*For Your Consideration* (2006), a film directed by Christopher Guest. This sharp piece of social satire sends up actors and the awards they receive, pointing out the self-congratulatory nature of institutions like the Academy Awards.

*Adaptation* (2002), a film directed by Charlie Kaufman. This film is about Kaufman, who wrote *Being John Malkovich*. In this movie, Kaufman participates in the production of *Being John Malkovich* while trying to adapt a novel into another screenplay. Along the way, Kaufman exposes the fears and fantasies that haunt him during the creative process of writing a screenplay.

*Kiss Me, Kate* (1948), a musical play by Cole Porter. In this musical, the actors attempt to perform a version of William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. *Kiss Me, Kate* was honored with a Tony Award in 1949, demonstrating the popularity of the "play-within-a-play"—or in this case the "play-within-a-musical"—format.

*Hamlet* (c. 1601), a tragedy by William Shakespeare. In this play, as Hamlet tries to determine whether or not his uncle has killed his father, he produces a play that he thinks will force his uncle into confessing to the crime. He thereby raises questions about the nature and purpose of theatrical productions.

move that breaks the dramatic unity separating audience from players—to assume roles as partners in this charade. It is a play of ironic contrasts between what the liberal, intellectual Phil announces to the camera and what he actually does: a play about one man's self-delusions. The play also goes beyond simple satire of hypocrisy, examining fundamental questions about the very nature of reality. The questions it raises are reminiscent of Wittgenstein's: What is the reality signified by what people say? Do the words people use signify what they really mean—do they themselves know what they mean and what reality is? What is real and what is merely a representation of what is real?

Given the recent popularity of "reality" television, *The Sandboy*—with its questions regarding the nature of reality and the way it is portrayed through language and, indeed, visuals—is clearly before its time in representing the problems of capturing "reality." Furthermore, if the "reality" we

can understand is never simply what it is, but always our own representation or web of symbols, the idea of being delusional is itself somewhat called into question.

### Works in Critical Context

Michael Frayn is a satirist who has moved from newspaper columns to novels to television productions to stage plays. Judging from the critical responses, he seems to have conquered each medium. His plays have been popular with audiences who are attracted to their humor and with critics who have noted and reveled in their underlying social and philosophical commentary.

***Noises Off*** Although many renowned comedies and dramas have used the play-within-a-play format in the past—it is a device that predates Shakespeare—perhaps no self-referential play has been so widely received in this generation as *Noises Off*, a no-holds-barred slapstick farce. *Noises Off* invites the audience to witness the turmoil behind a touring company of has-beens and never-weres as they attempt to perform a typically English sex farce called 'Nothing On.' Referring to the production as "a show that gave ineptitude a good name," *Insight* writer Sheryl Flatow observes that *Noises Off* was criticized by some as nothing more than a relentless, if effective, laugh-getting machine. The charge of being too funny, however, is not the sort of criticism that repels audiences, and *Noises Off* enjoyed a long run on both London's West End and New York's Broadway. Describing his own play, Frayn states: "The fear that haunts [the cast] is that the unlearned and unrehearsed—the great dark chaos behind the set, inside the heart and brain—will seep back on to the stage. . . . Their performance will break down, and they will be left in front of us naked and ashamed."

Critic Benedict Nightingale describes it in the *New Statesman* as "by far the funniest play in London," a view shared by many others. And in *TLS: The Times Literary Supplement*, Peter Kemp writes, "Having first parodied a farce, then brilliantly engineered his own, Frayn finally sabotages one. . . . Juggling expertly with its own stock in trade, *Noises Off* is a farce that makes you think as well as laugh."

***Copenhagen*** Where Frayn succeeded in out-farc-ing the farce with *Noises Off*, he may just have out-dramaed the drama in *Copenhagen*. The *New York Times* reviewer Ben Brantley notes, "*Copenhagen*, a critical and (more surprisingly) popular hit when it opened in London at the Royal National Theater in 1998, is nominally about a subject with all the sex appeal of a frozen flounder: a meeting in 1941 between the venerable Danish physicist Niels Bohr (Mr. Bosco) and Werner Heisenberg (Mr. Cumpsty), his former pupil and a German, during which no one to this day knows exactly what happened." Despite such a seemingly "unsexy" premise, Brantley concludes that the play is "endlessly fascinating" and that its protagonists take "possession of your own imagination as well, probably raising your blood pressure in the



process. And who would ever have thought it: that three dead, long-winded people talking about atomic physics would be such electrifying companions?" Likewise, in a review for the *Guardian*, David Hare writes, "Audiences flock to *Copenhagen* because they judge, rightly, that Michael Frayn has something interesting to tell them about nuclear physics." But *Copenhagen* is hardly just a play about ideas; it is a play about how ideas themselves are also about people, and it is perhaps in this that its enduring appeal may be found.

## Responses to Literature

1. If the "play-within-a-play" setup is designed to make a comment upon the process of writing and producing plays, then what is Frayn communicating about the creative process in *Noises Off*? Support your response with analysis of passages from the play.
2. Frayn has been described as a writer of farce. Using the Internet and the library, research the word *farce*. How would you define this word as it relates to Frayn's work? Support your response with analyses of passages from his work.
3. Frayn's *The Sandboy* raises a number of the same questions asked by philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein regarding reality and language. Based on your reading of the play, what kinds of answers—if any—does Frayn offer to these questions?
4. Frayn's *The Tin Men* is widely considered a fine example of satire. Read the novel and, in order to understand the complexities of writing effective satire, try to use Frayn's style to satirize an aspect from today's popular culture.

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## Sigmund Freud

BORN: 1856, Freiberg, Moravia (now Czech Republic)

DIED: 1939, London, England

NATIONALITY: Austrian

GENRE: Nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Interpretation of Dreams*  
(1899)

*On Narcissism* (1914)

*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920)

*The Ego and the Id* (1923)

*Civilization and Its Discontents*  
(1930)

## Overview

The work of Sigmund Freud, the Austrian founder of psychoanalysis, marked the beginning of a modern, dynamic psychology by providing the first systematic explanation of the inner mental forces determining human behavior.



Sigmund Freud Hulton Archive / Getty Images



Early in his career Sigmund Freud distinguished himself as a histologist, neuropathologist, and clinical neurologist, and in his later life he was acclaimed as a talented writer and essayist. Freud is considered one of the most influential and controversial thinkers of the twentieth century for his development of the theories and methodologies of psychoanalysis. Central to his theory is the concept of the unconscious, which he described as a primitive region of the psyche containing emotions, memories, and drives that are hidden from and repressed by the conscious mind. Under his guidance, psychoanalysis became the dominant modern theory of human psychology and a major tool of research, as well as an important method of psychiatric treatment that currently has thousands of practitioners all over the world.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***His Mother's Favorite*** Sigismund Schlomo Freud was born on May 6, 1856, in Freiberg, Moravia, now part of the Czech Republic. Sigmund was the first child of his twice-widowed father's third marriage. His mother, Amalia Nathanson, was nineteen years old when she married Jacob Freud, aged thirty-nine. Sigmund's two stepbrothers from his father's first marriage were approximately the same age as his mother, and his older stepbrother's son, Sigmund's nephew, was his earliest playmate. Thus, the boy grew up in an unusual family structure, his mother halfway in age between himself and his father. Though seven younger children were born, Sigmund always remained his mother's favorite. When he was four, the family moved to Vienna, the capital of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and one of the great cultural, scientific, and medical centers of Europe. Freud remained in Vienna until a year before his death.

***Youth in Vienna*** Freud went to the local elementary school and attended the humanistic high school (or gymnasium) from 1866 to 1873. He studied Greek and Latin, mathematics, history, and the natural sciences, and was a superior student. He passed his final examination with flying colors, qualifying to enter the University of Vienna at the age of seventeen. His family had recognized his special scholarly gifts from the beginning, and although they had only four bedrooms for eight people, Sigmund had his own room throughout his school days. As was the custom at the time, he lived with his parents well into adulthood, moving out when he was twenty-seven.

***Pre-Psychoanalytic Work*** Freud first considered studying law but then enrolled in medical school. He spent seven instead of the usual five years acquiring his doctorate, taking time to work in the zoological and anatomical laboratories of the famous Ernst Brücke. At nineteen he conducted his first independent research

project while on a field trip, and at twenty he published his first scientific paper.

Freud received his doctor of medicine degree at the age of twenty-four and went on to spend three years as a resident physician in the famous Allgemeine Krankenhaus, a general hospital that was the medical center of Vienna. Psychiatry at that time was static and descriptive. A patient's signs and symptoms were carefully observed and recorded in the hope that doing so would lead to a correct diagnosis of an organic disease of the brain, which was assumed to be the basis of all psychopathology (mental disorder). The psychological meaning of behavior was not itself considered important; behavior was only a set of symptoms to be studied in order to understand the structures of the brain. Freud's later work revolutionized this attitude; yet, like all scientific revolutions, this one grew from a thorough understanding of and expertise in the traditional methods.

During the last part of his residency Freud received a grant to pursue his neurological studies abroad. He spent four months at the Salpêtrière clinic in Paris, studying under the neurologist Jean Martin Charcot. Here, Freud first became interested in hysteria and Charcot's demonstration of its psychological origins. Thus, Freud's development of a psychoanalytic approach to mental disorders was rooted in nineteenth-century neurology rather than in the psychiatry of the era.

***Beginning of Psychoanalysis*** Freud returned to Vienna, established himself in the private practice of neurology, and married. He soon devoted his efforts to the treatment of hysterical patients with the help of hypnosis, a technique he had studied under Charcot. Joseph Breuer, an older colleague who had become Freud's friend and mentor, told Freud about a hysterical patient whom he had treated successfully by hypnotizing her and then tracing her symptoms back to traumatic events she had experienced at her father's deathbed. Breuer called his treatment "catharsis" and attributed its effectiveness to the release of "pent-up emotions." Freud's experiments with Breuer's technique were successful, demonstrating that hysterical symptoms could consistently be traced to highly emotional experiences that had been "repressed," or excluded from conscious memory. Together with Breuer he published *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), which included several theoretical chapters, a series of Freud's case studies, and Breuer's initial case study. At the age of thirty-nine Freud first used the term *psychoanalysis*, and his major lifework was well under way.

At about this time Freud began a unique undertaking, his own self-analysis, which he pursued primarily by analyzing his dreams. As he proceeded, his personality changed. He developed a greater inner security, and his at times impulsive emotional responses became less marked. A major scientific result was *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1901). In this book he argues that the dreams of every person, just like the symptoms of a hysterical or

an otherwise neurotic person, serve as a “royal road” to the understanding of unconscious mental processes, which have great importance in determining behavior. By the turn of the century Freud had increased his knowledge of the formation of neurotic symptoms to include conditions and reactions other than hysteria. He had also developed his therapeutic technique, dropping the use of hypnosis and shifting to the more effective and more widely applicable method of “free association.”

**Development of Psychoanalysis** Following his work on dreams, Freud wrote a series of papers in which he explored the influence of unconscious mental processes on virtually every aspect of human behavior—slips of the tongue and simple errors of memory (*The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, 1901), humor (*Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, 1905) and artistic creativity (*Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, 1910)—as well as cultural institutions (*Totem and Taboo*, 1912). He recognized that predominant among the unconscious forces that lead to neuroses are the sexual desires of early childhood that have been excluded from conscious awareness, yet have preserved their dynamic force within the personality. He described his highly controversial views concerning infantile sexuality in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), a work that initially met vehement protest but was gradually accepted by practically all schools of psychology. During this period he also published a number of case histories and a series of articles dealing with psychoanalysis as therapy.

After 1902 Freud gathered a small group of interested people on Wednesday evenings for presentations of psychoanalytic papers and discussion. This was the beginning of the psychoanalytic movement. Swiss psychiatrists Eugen Bleuler and Carl Jung formed a study group in Zurich in 1907, and the first International Psychoanalytic Congress was held in Salzburg in 1908. In 1909 Freud was invited to give five lectures at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. He considered this invitation the first official recognition to be extended to his new science.

At the same time Freud made a major revision in his theory of childhood sexuality. He first thought that his neurotic patients had actually experienced sexual seductions in childhood, but he then realized that his patients were usually describing childhood fantasies, or wishes, rather than actual events. He retracted his earlier statement on infantile sexuality, but he rejected neither the data nor the theory—he simply reformulated both. Later, as psychoanalysis became better established, several of Freud’s closest colleagues broke with him and established groups of their own, some of which continue to this day. Among them, Jung, Alfred Adler, Otto Rank, and Wilhelm Reich are the best known.

**Later Years** In 1923 Freud developed a cancerous growth in his mouth that led to his death sixteen years and thirty-three operations later. Despite his ill health, these were years of great scientific productivity. He pub-

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Freud’s famous contemporaries include:

**Arthur Clive Heward Bell** (1881–1964): English art critic and prominent proponent of formalism in aesthetics. Bell was a member of the Bloomsbury Group, an English collective responsible for influencing literature, aesthetics, criticism, and economics.

**Neville Chamberlain** (1869–1940): British conservative best known for appeasing Adolf Hitler and the Nazis with his signing of the 1938 Munich Agreement.

**E. M. Forster** (1879–1970): English novelist, short-story writer, and essayist best known for his novels examining class difference and hypocrisy in early twentieth-century British society.

**Carl Jung** (1875–1961): Swiss psychiatrist and founder of analytical psychoanalysis who is typically considered first a follower of Freud who then developed theoretical differences, split from Freud, and formed a new school of thought.

lished findings on the importance of aggressive as well as sexual drives (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920); developed a new theoretical framework to organize his new data concerning the structure of the mind (*The Ego and the Id*, 1923); revised his theory of anxiety, which he now interpreted as a signal of danger emanating from unconscious fantasies rather than the result of repressed sexual feelings (*Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*, 1926); and discussed religion, civilization, and further questions of theory and technique.

In March 1938 Austria was occupied by German troops, and Freud and his family were put under house arrest. Through the combined efforts of Marie Bonaparte, Princess of Greece; British psychoanalyst Ernest Jones; and W. C. Bullitt, the American ambassador to France, the Freuds were permitted to leave Austria in June. Freud’s keen mind and ironic sense of humor were evident when, forced to flee his home at the age of eighty-two, suffering from cancer, and in mortal danger, he was asked to sign a document attesting that he had been treated well by the Nazi authorities; as biographer Ernest Jones quoted, he added in his own handwriting, “I can heartily recommend the Gestapo to anyone.” Freud spent his last year in London, undergoing surgery. He died on September 23, 1939. The influence of his discoveries on the science and culture of the twentieth century is incalculable.

### Works in Literary Context

**Personal Life Influence** Freud’s personal life has long been a subject of interest to admirers and critics.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud introduced a conceptual framework for the basic structure of the psyche, a framework he extended in theory throughout his career. Here are a few works by writers who covered similar subjects:

*13 Dreams Freud Never Had* (2005), a nonfiction book by J. Allan Hobson, M.D. Neuroscientific study of the dreaming brain-mind, as reported by a Harvard psychiatrist and neuroscientist who uses his own dreams for the study.

*Man and His Symbols* (1964), a work of nonfiction by Carl G. Jung. Jung's most significant theories as collected and explained by contemporaries, experts, and scholars.

*The Writings of Anna Freud* (1974), a nonfiction collection by Anna Freud. Collected papers and lectures on child development and psychology by the daughter of Sigmund Freud.

An intensely private man, Freud made several attempts to thwart future biographers by destroying personal papers. However, his scientific work, his friends, and his extensive correspondence allow historians to paint a vivid picture.

Freud was an imposing man, although physically small. He read extensively, loved to travel, and was an avid collector of archeological curiosities. As an adult, Freud did not practice Judaism as a religion. Despite this fact, his Jewish cultural background and tradition were important influences on his thinking. He considered himself Jewish and maintained contact with Jewish organizations; one of his last works was a study of Moses and the Jewish people. Devoted to his family, he always practiced in a consultation room attached to his home. He was intensely loyal to his friends and inspired loyalty in a circle of disciples that persists to this day.

**Professional Influence** His bold and original sexual theories influenced colleagues and have provoked ongoing controversy. Freud's insistence on the libido as the dominant human drive led to breaks with some of his illustrious followers, notably Alfred Adler and Carl Jung, who respectively emphasized a "will to power" and a mythic/spiritual questing as important sources of unconscious energy. But the Freud-led international psychoanalytic movement gained considerable influence in professional circles in the period before World War I, and Freudian theory had been popularized in Europe and the United States by the 1920s. *Freud's Vorlesungen zur Einfuehrung in die Psychoanalyse* (General Introduction to Psychoanalysis), published in 1916 and translated into English four years later, introduced his basic ideas

about dreams, errors, sexual development, and neurosis to a general readership.

### Works in Critical Context

While Freudian concepts and language now suffuse Western culture, psychoanalytic theory remains highly controversial more than half a century after Freud's death. He continues to be criticized for exaggerating unconscious sexual motivations, and many of his theories about female sexuality are now widely dismissed. More fundamentally, the very concept of an unconscious yet communicative mind has been challenged and psychoanalysis itself belittled as pseudoscience.

But Freud himself made only limited claims for the therapeutic value of psychoanalysis. Whether or not his theories hold up—and there is still much argument on both sides—his genius in introducing an entirely new way of thinking about human behavior is universally acknowledged.

While most of his works have earned recognition for making profound contributions to Western culture, one theory as well as one other work stand out: psychosexual theory and *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

**Three Contributions to the Sexual Theory** *Three Contributions to the Sexual Theory* (1905) secured Freud's international reputation and notoriety. In it, the Viennese psychiatrist outlines the childhood stages of sexual development, whose successful passage he thought vital to adult happiness and psychic equilibrium.

**The Interpretation of Dreams (1900)** In this book, which remains one of his most widely read works, the psychiatrist states that dreams often express unconscious desires (or deep-seated wishes) in symbolic form. While many readers found these ideas interesting, some critics were less impressed. An unnamed reviewer for *The Nation* states of the book, "The layman must certainly see in this conception much that will appear to him fantastic, if not absurd. The psychologist must see in it the building of a huge structure upon a very slim and unstable foundation." Carl Jung, in a 1933 essay on the differences between him and Freud, describes the book as an instance of Freud putting "his peculiar mental disposition naïvely on view," and faults the author for not supporting his basic premise.

### Responses to Literature

1. Consider Freud's biography in relation to *The Interpretation of Dreams*. What similarities exist between his life and his work?
2. What questions would you ask Freud about dreams if he were alive today? What, if any, challenges to his ideas might you pose?

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## Brian Friel

BORN: 1929, Omagh, Tyrone, Northern Ireland

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964)

*Faith Healer* (1979)

*Translations* (1980)

*Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990)

### Overview

One of the leading Irish dramatists of his era, Brian Friel is noted for his deft use of language, his sensitive charac-



Brian Friel Thos Robinson / Getty Images

terizations, and his interest in Irish life and history. In his plays, Ireland not only provides the canvas upon which his largely rural characters are portrayed, but it also acts as a character itself. Friel is a central figure in the resurgence of interest in Irish drama that took place on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1980s and 1990s. He follows in the tradition of W. B. Yeats, John Millington Synge, Sean O'Casey, and other Irish artists of the early twentieth century. He has achieved commercial and critical success with works that address pressing social concerns.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***The Strong Influence of School*** Friel was born Bernard Patrick Friel on January 9, 1929, outside of Omagh, County Tyrone, in Northern Ireland. His father was a primary-school principal, and his mother was a postmistress from Glenties in County Donegal. When Friel was ten, his family moved to Londonderry. After completing his secondary education, Friel went to the seminary at

St. Patrick's College. He graduated in 1948, but instead of entering the priesthood, he attended St. Joseph's Teacher Training College in Belfast. He then returned to the Derry area and spent the next ten years teaching in various schools. The figure of the schoolmaster is present in many of his stories and plays.

### ***The Irish Civil War and Continuing Troubles***

In the years before and after Friel's birth, the people of Ireland were embroiled in a divisive conflict over the country's fate as either a dominion of Great Britain or as an independent nation. According to a treaty signed in 1921, Ireland was established as a free state that would remain a part of the United Kingdom. Opponents of the treaty included many members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), who had long fought to establish Ireland's complete independence from England. These republicans argued that remaining a part of the United Kingdom would deny them the complete freedom and independence they sought for their country—especially since the treaty specifically required Irish citizens to pledge an oath of allegiance to the reigning British monarch. The bloody conflict between republicans and free-state supporters lasted less than a year, but resulted in the death of thousands, including both soldiers and civilians caught in the action. The republicans lost the battle, though the cause of complete independence remained the focus of the IRA in the decades following the war. The cities of Belfast and Londonderry—referred to simply as “Derry” by republicans—which feature prominently in Friel's life, were among the areas most affected by the ongoing strife.

**Teacher and Storywriter** During his years as a schoolteacher, Friel wrote short stories. Because Friel was born into the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland, the violence and alienation of the Northern Irish is never far beneath the surface of his stories. His first published story, “The Child” (1952), described the disappointment of a child who hopes and prays, in vain, that his parents will stop fighting. Already present in this story is a central Friel theme: the division between hope and reality. In 1954 he married Ann Morrison, with whom he fathered five children. He was active in the Irish civil rights movement of the time as a member of the Nationalist Party, which supported Irish independence from England; however, the “troubles” and sectarian politics that are so dominant in Irish history are largely absent from his writing.

Friel found early success with his short fiction, broadcasting numerous stories on BBC Radio starting in 1956. He began publishing stories steadily in the *New Yorker* magazine. In addition to his stories, he worked as a freelance journalist, submitting articles to *Commonweal* and the *Irish Press*. In 1960 Friel ended his teaching career and began writing full-time.

**Shift to Drama** Friel's first story collection, *The Sauer of Larks*, was published in 1962. By this time, he was

also writing stage plays, some of which were produced at Dublin's famous Abbey Theatre, seat of the Irish dramaturgical tradition of Yeats, O'Casey and others. In 1963, to increase his knowledge of the working theater, Friel accepted an invitation from the noted Anglo-Irish director Tyrone Guthrie to visit him in Minneapolis, at the theater that bears Guthrie's name. The four months Friel spent observing Guthrie direct *Hamlet* and Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* initiated his shift from short fiction to drama.

**Transatlantic Productions** In 1964 Friel completed the play that was to be his first commercial success and that would secure his international reputation: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* The play is about Gareth O'Donnell, who departs from Ireland to the promise of a new life in Philadelphia. The story delves into the inner state of the immigrant through an unconventional device: Gareth is split into his public and private selves, played by two actors. The drama enjoyed a successful run in its author's native Northern Ireland and in London, then played at New York's Helen Hayes Theatre for 326 performances, the longest run for an Irish play on Broadway. The American theater community gave Friel such a warm reception that his next play, *The Loves of Cass McGuire* (1966), was staged in New York before its production in Dublin. In that play, an eighty-nine-year-old Irish woman returns home after thirty-four years in America, only to be relegated to a rest home by her brother and his wife. A steady stream of dramatic works followed over the next fifteen years, each produced on one or both sides of the Atlantic.

The 1970s was a time of increased political violence in Northern Ireland. In January 1972, civil rights organizers in Londonderry marched to protest imprisonment without trial. British soldiers started arresting people and began shooting at the unarmed crowd. Thirteen people died. Shortly afterward, Friel wrote *The Freedom of the City* (1973), an overtly political play that relates the events of three Irish civil-rights demonstrators in Londonderry, moving freely through time, and counterpointing the action with snippets from an academic lecture.

Friel increased his standing with two stage successes in 1979. *Faith Healer* consists of four monologues, by characters living and dead, attempting to sort out the life of Frank Hardy, who is either a miracle worker or a charlatan. The play opened on Broadway while Friel's *Aristocrats* (1979) was running at the Abbey in Dublin. The latter play concerns a family of Irish Catholic gentry in decline whose inner workings are exposed as friends, family, and outsiders gather to witness the wedding of the family's youngest daughter. Critics drew numerous comparisons to the stage works of Anton Chekhov, and indeed, Friel wrote *Aristocrats* while working on a translation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*.

**Critical Successes** In 1980 Friel and actor Stephen Rea formed the Field Day, a theater company dedicated



to bringing professional theater to communities throughout Ireland. Friel's play *Translations* (1980), the Field Day's first production, obliquely addresses the struggle in Northern Ireland by depicting the collision between the English and the Irish in 1833, when the English succeeded in closing Gaelic schools despite native resistance. *Translations* explores the nature of language and reveals its political exploitation as a colonizing tool; many consider it Friel's best play.

Friel's greatest commercial success as a playwright came with *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990), another metaphorically suggestive play with complex characterizations and relationships. It is a portrait of a woman-run household where five spinster sisters dance and sing when a radio arrives. The title of the play refers to a harvest festival honoring the ancient pagan god Lugh, a tribute to celebrating the past with the present. *Dancing at Lughnasa* won the British Olivier Award and American Tony Award for best play of the year and was adapted into a motion picture in 1998 starring Meryl Streep.

More recent Friel plays include *Molly Sweeney* (1994), about a blind woman who regains her sight, and *Afterplay* (2002), which imagines the meeting of several characters from Chekhov. Friel has translated or adapted for the stage several works by Chekhov and Russian novelist Ivan Turgenev. Friel was elected to the prestigious Irish arts association Aosdana in 1982, and in 1987 he was appointed to the Irish Senate, the first writer to be honored in this way since William Butler Yeats. Famously shy of publicity, he lives with his wife in County Donegal.

### Works in Literary Context

Friel's plays are frequently compared with those of Chekhov, and, indeed, their underlying sense of pathos and futility, and their reliance on subtle, subtextual clues to convey character and message, draw upon the influence of the Russian master. Friel's short stories, however, are more distinctly Irish in derivation. Friel has expressed his indebtedness to Sean O'Faolain on many occasions; critics also see Friel's style as influenced by, or even derivative of, Frank O'Connor and Liam O'Flaherty. The short fiction of John Updike and V. S. Pritchett has also won Friel's admiration.

**Ballybeg** In both his stories and his plays, Friel has created his own fictional landscape, which he called Ballybeg, or, literally, "small town" (from the Irish *Baile Beag*). All of the area is part of the historical province of Ulster, in what today is County Donegal. The locale functions as a microcosm of Ireland, a canvas on which to paint Irish concerns, social norms, and characters seemingly indifferent to the island's political divisions.

**Irish Characters** None of Friel's stories has an urban setting, and they are peopled entirely by characters who maintain a slightly naive understanding of the world. No one is particularly evil, and deceptions and lies are perpe-

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Friel's famous contemporaries include:

**Derek Walcott** (1930–): West Indian playwright and poet; winner of the 1992 Nobel Prize in Literature.

**Chinua Achebe** (1930–): Nigerian novelist and poet; author of *Things Fall Apart*.

**Frank McCourt** (1930–): Irish American author of *Angela's Ashes*.

**Athol Fugard** (1932–): South African playwright and stage director.

**Seamus Heaney** (1939–): Irish poet; winner of the 1995 Nobel Prize in Literature.

**Mary Robinson** (1944–): President of Ireland, 1990–1997; United Nations high commissioner for human rights, 1997–2002.

trated against the self, toward sustaining illusion, rather than against others. Throughout his work, Friel handles his characters with affection and compassion, reflecting an extraordinary sensitivity to human nature. Outwardly simple, the characters are inwardly complex, and the emotional battle of each is kept free of sentimentality by Friel's skillful use of language. The combination of intelligence and emotion in Friel's characters succeeds in conveying a strong sense of the inadequacies of human nature while affirming the continuum of life.

### Works in Critical Context

Friel's writing has been acclaimed for more than four decades. He had already earned a place among Ireland's top writers of short fiction, and a prestigious American outlet for his stories, when he turned to playwriting in the early 1960s. His plays have been warmly received and consistently produced. He is undoubtedly a leading figure in the revival of Irish drama in the last decades of the twentieth century.

**Mixed Evaluations** Critical appraisal of his work has not been uniformly appreciative. Friel is not considered a master of the short-story form; the consensus among critics is that all of his stories tend toward sameness in idea and execution. Friel has also defended himself against the charge that his stories are compromised by adherence to a formula suited to the *New Yorker* and to a foreign audience seeking a sentimental, idealized sense of Irishness. As a dramatist, critics perceive that Friel's mastery of character and fondness for storytelling outstrip his dramatic flair, depriving his plays of a sense of dynamism. Some critics find the overall scope of his work limited by its Irish milieu. Others, conversely, applaud



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Brian Friel's plays capture the modern Irish experience and are partially responsible for a revival of the Irish dramatic tradition. The following are among the most well-known works premiered in Ireland by Irish playwrights:

*Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902), a play by W. B. Yeats. A nationalistic play staged on opening night at the Irish National Theatre, the Abbey, in 1904.

*The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), a play by John Millington Synge. This drama, about a young man who may or may not have killed his father, provoked riots at its Dublin opening in January 1907.

*The Plough and the Stars* (1926), a play by Sean O'Casey. Set in Dublin, this work relates events leading to and including the famous Easter uprising of 1916.

*Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Toward the Somme* (1985), a play by Frank McGuinness. This work depicts the story of volunteers for the Ulster division in World War I.

*The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (1996), a play by Martin McDonagh. A black comedy about a middle-aged spinster who takes care of her elderly mother, the New York production won four Tony Awards in 1998.

his commitment to dramatizing the Irish national character and dilemma.

Critical studies of Friel's work appear in ever increasing numbers. Most focus almost exclusively on his dramatic works, viewing his short fiction only as a prelude to themes and ideas in the later dramas. A few critics, such as John Cronin in his contribution to the 1993 volume *The Achievement of Brian Friel*, analyze his stories for their own sake. Some recent studies, such as Scott Boltwood's *Brian Friel, Ireland, and the North*, delve into the relationship between the personal and the political in Friel's plays. Other commentators view language and its uses as a central Friel theme, an element that critics identify as common to the Irish dramatic tradition, from Oscar Wilde through W. B. Yeats to Samuel Beckett.

### Responses to Literature

1. Explore the theme of language in one or more of Friel's plays; for example *Translations*.
2. Does it make sense to think of Friel as simply an Irish writer? How does he relate the specifics of the Irish experience to universal human concerns?
3. Would you call Friel a political writer? How do his stories and plays address controversial issues in subtle or indirect ways?

4. Most of Friel's stories take place in the fictional village of Ballybeg. What function does this community play in his work?

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## Carlos Fuentes

BORN: 1928, Panama City, Panama

NATIONALITY: Mexican

GENRE: Fiction, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Death of Artemio Cruz* (1962)

*Terra Nostra* (1975)

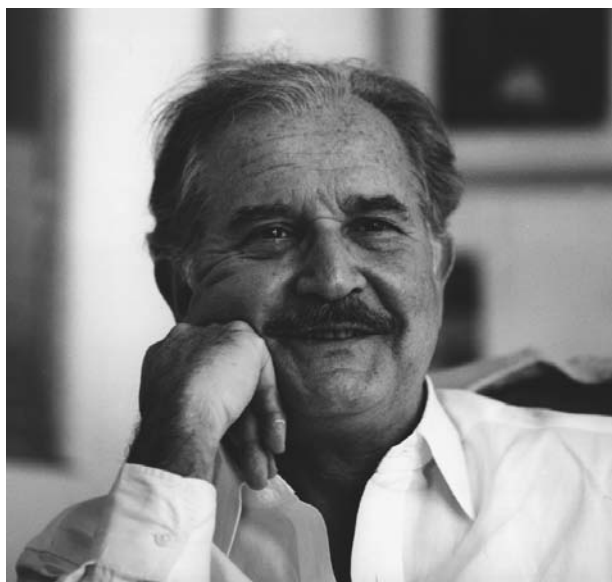
*Burnt Water* (1980)

*Orchids in the Moonlight* (1982)

*The Old Gringo* (1985)

### Overview

Carlos Fuentes is widely regarded as Mexico's foremost contemporary novelist. His overriding literary concern is to establish a viable Mexican identity, both as an autonomous entity and in relation to the outside world. In his work, Fuentes often intertwines myth, legend, and history to examine his country's roots and discover the essence of modern Mexican society. Fuentes writes: "Our political life is fragmented, our history shot through with failure, but our cultural tradition is rich, and I think the time is coming when we will have to look at our faces, our own past." This tradition incorporates elements of Aztec culture, the Christian faith imparted by the Spanish



Carlos Fuentes    Fuentes, Carlos, photograph. AP Images.

conquistadors, and the failed hopes of the Mexican Revolution. Fuentes uses the past, thematically and symbolically, to comment on contemporary concerns and to project his own vision of Mexico's future.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***Diplomatic Roots, Law School, and International Service*** Carlos Fuentes, the son of a Mexican career diplomat, was born on November 11, 1928, in Panama City, Panama. As a child, he lived at several diplomatic posts in Latin America and spent much of the 1930s in Washington, D.C. He attended high school in Mexico City and later entered the National University of Mexico. While studying law there, he published several short stories and critical essays in journals. After graduating from law school, Fuentes traveled to Geneva, Switzerland, to study international law and in 1950 began a long career in foreign affairs that culminated in his serving as Mexico's ambassador to France from 1975 to 1977.

***The Latin American Literature "Boom"*** Fuentes wrote throughout his diplomatic career, and in the late 1950s and early 1960s he gained international attention as an important contributor to the "boom" in Latin American literature. Along with such authors as Gabriel García Márquez and Julio Cortázar, Fuentes published works that received international acclaim and spurred the reassessment of the position that Latin American authors held in contemporary literature. Fuentes's work, like that of several writers associated with the "boom," is technically experimental, featuring disjointed chronology, varying narrative perspectives, and rapid cuts between scenes, through which he creates a surreal atmosphere. For exam-

ple, in his first novel, *Where the Air Is Clear* (1958), Fuentes uses a series of montage-like sequences to investigate the vast range of personal histories and lifestyles in Mexico City. This work, which provoked controversy due to its candid portrayal of social inequity and its socialist overtones, expresses Fuentes's perception of how the Mexican Revolution of the early twentieth century failed to realize its ideals. This revolution, which begun with an uprising led by Francisco I., was a reaction against the politics of dictator Porfirio Díaz and, ultimately, led to a complicated civil war. The frustration of the revolution, a recurring theme in his writing, forms the basis for one of Fuentes's most respected novels, *The Death of Artemio Cruz* (1962).

***Use of the Fantastic*** In the novella *Aura* (1962), Fuentes displays less concern with social criticism and makes greater use of bizarre images and the fantastic. Fuentes employs a disordered narrative in *A Change of Skin* (1967) to present a group of people who relive significant moments from their past as they travel together through Mexico. Fuentes's concern with the role of the past in determining the present is further demonstrated in *Terra Nostra* (1975), one of his most ambitious and successful works.

***Negotiating the Contextual Mexican Identity with Magic Realism*** Fuentes's later fiction investigates Mexico's relationship with the rest of the world. *Distant Relations* (1980), for example, involves a Mexican archaeologist and his son who meet relatives in France; on another level, however, this work is about the interaction between Mexican and European cultures. In this novel, an old man relates a tale to a man named Carlos Fuentes, who in turn relates the tale to the reader. Through the inclusion of ghosts and mysterious characters, Fuentes also introduces fantastic events into otherwise realistic settings, a technique prevalent in Latin American literature that is often termed magic realism. In the novel *The Old Gringo* (1985), which examines Mexican-American relations, Fuentes creates an imaginative scenario of the fate that befell American journalist Ambrose Bierce after he disappeared in Mexico in 1913.

***Plays, Short Stories, and Critical Essays*** In addition to his novels, Fuentes has written several plays, including *Orchids in the Moonlight* (1982), and has published the short-story collections *Los días enmascarados* (1954), *Cantar de ciegos* (1964), and *Chac Mool y otros cuentos* (1973). Many of his short stories appear in English translation in *Burnt Water* (1980). Fuentes is also respected for his essays, the topics of which range from social and political criticism to discussions of Mexican art.

In 1989 *The Old Gringo* was adapted as a film starring Jane Fonda and Gregory Peck. In 1994, said to be based on an alleged affair he had with the American actress Jean Seberg, Fuentes published *Diana, the Goddess Who Hunts Alone*, sparking controversy about the

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Fuentes's famous contemporaries include:

**Julio Cortázar** (1914–1984): Born in Belgium, Julio Cortázar was an Argentine writer who spent the last thirty years of his life in exile after he vocally opposed the dictatorship of Argentina's Juan Perón.

**Edward Albee** (1928–): American playwright famous for integrating absurdist elements into American theater. A three-time Pulitzer Prize winner, Albee is most widely known for having written the play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962).

**Alejo Carpentier** (1904–1980): Cuban novelist who exerted a tremendous influence on contemporary Latin American writers; his writings are considered some of the earliest examples of magic realism.

**Gregory Peck** (1916–2003): American actor Peck was a major box office draw from the 1940s to the 1960s. One of Peck's last roles was in the film version of *Old Gringo* (1989).

**Jean Seberg** (1938–1979): An American actress best remembered for her roles in the "New Wave" of French cinema in the 1960s. Fuentes's fictionalized relationship with Seberg was the subject of his work *Diana, the Goddess Who Hunts Alone* (1994).

historical accuracy of the book's contents. Throughout the 1990s and up to present day, Fuentes has steadily published novels, short stories, critical essays on politics and culture, in addition to his academic duties as professor at Brown University; he has taught courses at universities throughout the United States.

### Works in Literary Context

Among Fuentes's major themes are the quest for Mexican national identity—influenced by the writings of the Mexican philosophers José Vasconcelos and Samuel Ramos, and by the seminal work on the Mexican national character by Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950)—and a continued and profound exploration of the components of that identity: political, historic, social, psychological, and mythic. One of Fuentes's most compelling themes is the world of the gods and goddesses of the Aztec pantheon—especially the god of life and love, Quetzalcoatl—his downfall and self-banishment from the New World, and his supposed return in the form of the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés, examined in *Terra Nostra* and in his drama *Todos los gatos son pardos*.

**American Influence on Mexico** Another theme that appears throughout Fuentes's work is that of the United States and the tremendous social, cultural, and

political impact it has exerted on his homeland, Mexico. Fuentes is decidedly ambivalent toward the country viewed in Latin America as the Colossus of the North. He spent much of his life traveling and lecturing in the United States, teaching at major North American universities, and collaborating on Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) projects, such as the one commemorating the voyage of Christopher Columbus in 1492. In his fictional works Fuentes emphasizes the fact that the greatest revolutionary force in Mexico is not the rebellious, ultimately defeated, *los de abajo* (lower class) but the North American presence. And in *Old Gringo*, in an attempt to come to grips with the North American–Mexican cultural clash, Fuentes evokes a revolutionary Mexico at the beginning of the twentieth century through North American eyes and from a feminist perspective. Thus the narrator and the most important character is neither the acerbic and misanthropic Ambrose Bierce, to whom the title refers, nor the revolutionary general in the army of Pancho Villa, Tomás Arroyo—who in a fit of rage kills Bierce, ironically granting Bierce the death he has sought in Mexico—but the recluse, Harriet Winslow.

**The History and Future of Mexico** Fuentes's concern with the role of the past in determining the present is further demonstrated in *Terra Nostra*. Many critics believe that this novel exceeds the scope of his earlier fiction, extending the idea of history as a circular force by incorporating scenes from the future into the text. *Terra Nostra* is divided into three sections: "The Old World," which concerns Spain during the reign of Philip II; "The New World," about the Spanish conquest of Mexico; and "The Next World," which ends as the twenty-first century begins. By tracing the evolution of Mexico beginning with the Spanish conquest, Fuentes depicts the violence and cruelty that originated in the Mediterranean area and was perpetuated in Mexico through Spanish colonialism.

*Christopher Unborn* (1987), a verbally extravagant novel, continues Fuentes's interest in Mexican history. This work is narrated by Christopher Palomar, an omniscient fetus conceived by his parents in hopes of winning a contest to commemorate the quincentenary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas. According to contest rules, the male baby born closest to midnight on October 12, 1992, whose family name most closely resembles Columbus will assume leadership of Mexico at the age of twenty-one. The novel's nine chapters symbolize Christopher's gestation and allude to Columbus's voyage, which Fuentes views as a symbol of hope for Mexico's rediscovery and rebirth. Narrating from his mother's womb, Christopher uses wordplay, literary allusions, and grotesque humor, combining family history with caustic observations on the economic and environmental crises afflicting contemporary Mexico. *Christopher Unborn* satirizes Mexico's government as inept and its

citizenry as complacent, warning that the country's collapse is imminent without change.

As a key figure in the Latin American "boom" of the mid-twentieth century, Fuentes has exerted a considerable influence on later generations of Latin American writers. Vaulted to international fame and respect, Fuentes and his fellow boom writers loom so large that later writers who followed in their footsteps are called "post-boom." Writers like Isabel Allende, whom Frederick Nunn has called "a product of the Boom," are indirectly influenced by Fuentes and his ilk; as a reaction against the thematic and stylistic experiments of the boom, they have returned to a more realistic, naturalistic writing style. Style differences aside, their success and international acclaim are a direct result of the trails blazed by the likes of Fuentes.

### Works in Critical Context

In discussing the critical response to the work of Fuentes, accomplished author Octavio Paz illuminates a stark divide in opinions about his work. Paz praises Fuentes's tendency toward extremes and defends him against his harsher critics, of which there are many. He writes, "Novels, stories, plays, chronicles, literary and political essays: Fuentes's body of work is already one of the richest and most varied of contemporary literature in our language. . . . Fuentes has been and is the main course of many cannibal banquets, for in literary matters—and not only in this, but in almost all social relations—Mexico is a country for which human flesh is a delicacy." Similarly, critic Earl Shorris echoes Paz's assessment of the place held by Fuentes in Mexican letters. In assessing Fuentes's career, Shorris concludes that he "has been the palimpsest of Mexican history and culture separated into its discrete layers: Indian, Spanish, French, revolutionary, aristocratic, leftist, centrist, expatriate. In this analyzed presentation of the person, this soul shown after the centrifuge, Mr. Fuentes demonstrates the complexity of the Mexican character and the artistic difficulties peculiar to the novelist born in the Navel of the Universe, which is where the Aztecs placed Mexico."

Fuentes's achievements in the novel genre have been recognized through his being awarded several distinguished prizes including the Premio Alfonso Reyes in 1980. *Cambio de piel*, one of his most intricate and problematic novels, was awarded the Premio Biblioteca Breve by the Barcelona publishing house Seix Barral. In 1975 Fuentes received the Premio Xavier Villaurrutia in Mexico City and in 1977 was awarded the Rómulo Gallegos prize in Venezuela, both honors for his novel *Terra Nostra*, which he wrote while a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. In 1984 he was awarded the Mexican Premio Nacional de la Literatura by President Miguel de la Madrid, and in 1987 he received the Spanish Premio Cervantes in Madrid, awarded by King Juan Carlos.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The works of other authors who, like Fuentes, have explored Mexican national identity include:

*The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950), a collection of essays by Octavio Paz. The unifying theme of these works, written by one of Mexico's most respected authors, is an analysis of the character of the Mexican people, particularly the cultural emphasis on solitude and death.

*Like Water for Chocolate* (1989), a novel by Laura Esquivel. A masterwork of magic realism, this story follows a woman who expresses her feelings, literally, through her cooking; each chapter begins with a Mexican-food recipe.

*The Plumed Serpent* (1926), a novel by D. H. Lawrence. The title references the serpent-god Quetzalcoatl. This work, written from the perspective of non-Mexican outsiders, explores both contemporary Mexico and its pre-Columbian past.

### Responses to Literature

1. Read Ambrose Bierce's famous short story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," which is mentioned in *Old Gringo*. What does that story tell you about the character of Bierce as Carlos Fuentes portrays him in the novel?
2. Fuentes outlines a projection of the future of the Hispanic people in *Terra Nostra*. Read and analyze this projection. Do you agree with Fuentes's ideas? Why or why not?
3. The stories of Carlos Fuentes can range over a wide variety of themes. Contrast two stories that deal with dissimilar themes and analyze their differences.
4. Identify and characterize conflicting layers of society in Fuentes's short stories. How do the different elements interact with each other?

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## ❑ Athol Fugard

BORN: 1932, Middleburg, South Africa

NATIONALITY: South African

GENRE: Drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Blood Knot* (1961)

*Boesman and Lena* (1969)

*Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* (1972)

*"Master Harold" ... and the Boys* (1982)

#### Overview

Athol Fugard is South Africa's foremost playwright and one of the leading dramatists of the latter twentieth century. A writer, director, and performer, he has worked collaboratively with performers across the racial divide and transformed South African theater. In his work, Fugard focused relentlessly on the injustices perpetuated by South Africa's apartheid system of government. As his plays make viscerally clear, all South Africans have been the victims of the tragic legacy of apartheid.

#### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***Racial Divide in Youth*** Harold Athol Lannigan Fugard was born on June 11, 1932, on a farm in Cape Province, in the semidesert Karoo region of South Africa. In 1935, the family moved to Port Elizabeth, which became his lifelong home. His father, a crippled former jazz pianist of English stock, amused the boy with fantastic stories and confused him with his unabashed bigotry. His mother—an Afrikaner descended from Dutch settlers who had been coming to South Africa for trade purposes since the late seventeenth century—supported the family by managing their boardinghouse and tearoom.



Athol Fugard Fugard, Athol, photograph. AP Images.



Fugard credits his mother with teaching him to view South African society with a critical eye.

By the 1930s, legal and social discrimination was firmly in place against South Africans of non-European ancestry. After slavery ended there in 1833, blacks were required to carry identification cards, and in the early twentieth century, the Native Land Acts of 1913 and 1936 prohibited blacks from owning land in areas of white residence. Only 13 percent of the land in South Africa was put aside for blacks, though they formed 70 percent of the population. By the 1930s, Afrikaners—the more uncompromising supporters of segregation than English-speaking whites—began using the term *apartheid* to refer to their ideas of racial separation.

As a white child growing up in a segregated society, Fugard resisted the racist upbringing offered him, but could not escape apartheid's influence. He insisted that the family's black servants call him Master Harold, and one day, he spat in the face of Sam Semela, a waiter in the Fugard boardinghouse, who was the best friend he had as a child.

**Transformation of Racial Beliefs** Fugard attended Catholic schools as a youth. He had his first experience of amateur dramatics in secondary school, as an actor and as director of the school play. A scholarship took him to the University of Cape Town, where he studied ethics. However, he dropped out just before graduation and toured the Far East while working aboard a merchant ship. Fugard has remarked that living and working with men of all races aboard the *Graigaur* liberated him from the prejudice endemic among those with his background. Within a year he was back home, working as a freelance journalist for the *Port Elizabeth Evening Post*. By then, he knew he wanted to write.

As Fugard prepared for such a career, apartheid policies had become more strict in South Africa. When the Afrikaner-backed Nationalist Party was elected into office in 1948, more apartheid laws began to be put into place. Such laws made it illegal for blacks to use first-class coaches of railroad cars and for marriage between people of different races and divided the country into regions for blacks, whites, and coloreds (those of mixed race). Black South Africans had fought such discriminatory practices since the early twentieth century, but by the late 1940s, one major group, the African National Congress (ANC), increased its tactics to include strikes and acts of civil disobedience.

After Fugard met Sheila Meiring, an actress from Cape Town, and married her in 1956, he developed an interest in drama and started off as an actor. The couple moved to Johannesburg and began collaborating with a group of black writers and actors in the ghetto township of Sophiatown. Fugard worked briefly as a clerk in the Native Commissioner's Court, which tried cases against

nonwhites arrested for failing to carry identification. Observing the machinery of apartheid up close opened his eyes to its evil effects. Out of these experiences came *No-Good Friday* (1958) and *Nongogo* (1959), his first two full-length plays, which Fugard and his black actor friends performed for small private audiences.

**The Blood Knot** Fugard moved to England in 1959 to write, but his work received little attention there, and he realized he needed to work in the context of his home country. South African apartheid policies were firmly in place, and blacks, coloreds, and Asians (a racial category added to apartheid laws in the 1950s) were fully, legally segregated from whites. When he returned home, he completed his first and only novel. *Tsotsi* (1980) concerns a young black hoodlum who accidentally kidnaps a baby and is compelled to face the consequences of his actions. Fugard tried to destroy the manuscript, but a copy survived and was published in 1980.

While finishing *Tsotsi*, Fugard wrote his breakthrough play, *The Blood Knot* (1961). The idea came to him in 1960 after the Sharpeville massacre, when police killed blacks protesting the apartheid pass laws—a turning point for all South Africans. *The Blood Knot* portrays the oscillating sense of conflict and harmony between two brothers born to the same mother. Morris has light skin and can pass for white. He confronts the truth about his identity when he returns home to live with his dark-skinned brother, Zach.

Fugard played the role of Morris himself. The play was first presented in 1961 to an invited audience. At that time, blacks and whites were banned from appearing on the same stage or sitting in the same audience. From the opening image of a shabby, pale-skinned man preparing a footbath for a black man, *The Blood Knot* struck South Africa's segregated culture like a bombshell. In 1962, Fugard supported a boycott against legally segregated theater audiences.

**Collaborative Theater** Returning to Port Elizabeth, Fugard helped found an all-black theater group called the Serpent Players. Despite police harassment, the group gave workshops and performed a variety of works for local audiences. Fugard also began to take his work overseas. His passport was revoked in 1967 after *The Blood Knot* aired on British television. Even after the government banned his plays, he refused to renounce his country. Fugard maintained that love, not hate, for South Africa would help that country break the chains of apartheid. In 1971, his travel restrictions were lifted, and Fugard traveled to England to direct his acclaimed play *Boesman and Lena* (1969), an unflinching portrayal of mutual hostility and dependence between a homeless mixed-race couple who wander without respite.

As Fugard gained increasing critical acclaim, he further refined his model of experimental, collaborative drama. He created his pieces with the actors, and staged



## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Fugard's famous contemporaries include:

**Nadine Gordimer** (1923–): A South African fiction writer and antiapartheid activist who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1961. She wrote *Burger's Daughter* (1969).

**Wole Soyinka** (1934–): The Nigerian playwright, poet, and essayist, who wrote the play *Kongi's Harvest* (1970).

**Desmond Tutu** (1931–): The Anglican archbishop of Cape Town, head of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and Nobel Peace Prize winner.

**Harold Pinter** (1930–): An English playwright, screenwriter, and poet famous for such plays as *The Homecoming* (1964).

**August Wilson** (1945–2005): The American dramatist whose Pittsburgh Cycle chronicles the African-American experience in the twentieth century.

them in small, unofficial venues, with minimal sets and props. With two talented black actors, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, Fugard produced three improvisational works with political themes: *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* (1972), in which a man assumes a dead man's identity in order to obtain an apartheid pass; *Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act* (1972), about an "illegal" biracial love affair; and *The Island* (1973), in which two political prisoners stage Sophocles' play *Antigone* to express solidarity and resistance. The "Statements Trilogy" was staged in London and New York to great acclaim. Another experiment was the nearly wordless drama *Orestes* (1971), which juxtaposes the Greek tragedy with a contemporary protest in South Africa, to explore the impact of violence on both its victims and its perpetrators.

Protests and repression grew more intense in the late 1970s in South Africa. Beginning in 1976, blacks in Soweto violently protested the use of Afrikaans in schools, and the suppression by South African police of the riots left 174 blacks dead and 1,139 injured. New protest groups and leaders emerged among young blacks. More protests followed the death of one such leader, Steven Biko, while in police custody. In this environment, the playwright turned to more personal concerns. In *A Lesson from Aloes* (1978), a Dutch Afrikaner declines to defend himself when accused of betraying his only friend to the police, and for most of the play the audience is unsure of his innocence.

**No Easy Answers** Fugard's plays of the 1980s continued to probe the social and psychological dimensions of his nation's crisis, which deepened with the declaration of a state of emergency in 1985. A new constitution came

into force that reinforced the political control of whites, leading to increased strikes and conflicts by nonwhites as well as international pressure for change. The emergency regulations gave police the power to arrest without warrants and detain people indefinitely without charging them or notifying their families.

Some of his works opened in the United States and were not staged in South Africa. *The Road to Mecca* (1984), explored the solitary white consciousness through an elderly artist who isolates herself at home, producing sculptures from cement and wire. Fugard departed from realism with *A Place with the Pigs* (1987), a parable concerning a Soviet soldier who hides in a pigsty for forty years. Both plays premiered in the United States.

*My Children! My Africa!* (1989) was the first Fugard play to premiere in South Africa in years. The work was inspired by the story of a black teacher who refused to participate in a school boycott and was later murdered in Port Elizabeth by a group that believed he was a police informer. The play provoked controversy with its implicit critique of the school boycotts organized by the African National Congress.

**Postapartheid** Fugard's plays consistently place multiple viewpoints into dialogue, and exempt no position from scrutiny. This stance coincides with the principles of "truth and reconciliation" with which South Africa attempted to heal its wounds in the 1990s. When F. W. de Klerk became the head of the National Party in the late 1980s, he began instituting a series of reforms, including the legalization of such groups as the ANC. Apartheid laws began to be repealed in the early 1990s, the ANC was elected into power in the mid-1990s, and black former political prisoner Nelson Mandela became president in 1994. The first of Fugard's postapartheid plays, *Playland* (1993), is a case in point. As two strangers—one black, one white—reveal their darkest secrets to each other in an amusement park, the inherited nightmares of apartheid surface, offering no easy answers and forcefully posing the question: Can the sins of the past be forgiven, if not forgotten?

*Valley Song* (1996), reflects the playwright's optimistic view of his nation's future after the inauguration of Mandela. It also reveals its author's inward focus: Fugard placed himself onstage as the self-styled author. Two of his more recent works were also tinged with nostalgia. *The Captain's Tiger* (1997) is a reflection on his months in the merchant marines, while *Exits and Entrances* (2004) explores his early theatrical career. Fugard continues to make his home in South Africa.

### Works in Literary Context

Fugard has created some classic works for the stage, but he acknowledges little influence from prior dramatists. The small casts, sparse sets, and flat dialogue in his plays reveal an aesthetic debt to Samuel Beckett. Reading

William Faulkner and Tennessee Williams early in his career confirmed his sense that he wanted to create drama that was, above all, local. Echoing one of his favorite authors, Albert Camus, Fugard says in *Notebooks, 1960–1977* that the “true meaning” of his life’s work is “just to witness” as truthfully as he can “the nameless and destitute” of his “one little corner of the world.” The greatest influence on his work comes from his collaborators, especially black performers, such as Zakes Mokae and John Kani, who carry on a rich, indigenous storytelling tradition.

***Psychology in Intimate Relationships*** According to Dennis Walder in *Athol Fugard*, Fugard’s plays “approximate . . . the same basic model established by *The Blood Knot*: a small cast of ‘marginal’ characters is presented in a passionately close relationship embodying the tensions current in their society.” For example, Boesman expresses his hatred of the South African political system in the form of violence toward Lena, who suffers Boesman’s misplaced rage with dignity. Similarly, in *My Children! My Africa!* the confrontation between the elderly black schoolteacher and the militant student reflects a gap between generations and ideologies. A Fugard play invariably reveals the damage that unjust social institutions inflict on the psychic and ethical integrity of individuals. Fugard forces audiences to consider his characters in their complexity, not to characterize them as good or bad.

***The Dramatic Image*** Fugard’s model is also consistent in the way his plays are produced. The actors are directly involved in the play’s creation. Unnecessary scenery, costumes, and props are stripped away, creating what the Polish director Jerzy Grotowski called “poor theater,” although Fugard was practicing it before he encountered Grotowski’s work. For Fugard, a play exists only when it is performed for an audience. The function of drama is to evoke the truth of what he calls “the living moment.” The intense, revelatory moments in his plays are usually expressed in images, such as the moment when Hally spits in Sam’s face in *Master Harold*, or when Zach looms above his brother Morris, provoked by racist insults into attack, in *The Blood Knot*.

### Works in Critical Context

Fugard is highly regarded by literary and theater critics. Some have called him the greatest playwright of his era. He commands respect for his unflinching opposition to apartheid and for his sophisticated explorations of its subtly destructive effects. Critics have also appreciated his ability to elicit emotion without declining into melodrama. Most South African drama, especially the nation’s lively alternative theater, bears the stamp of Fugard’s work. His acclaim is greater outside his home country. In the United States, he is one of the most frequently performed living playwrights.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The theater of Athol Fugard lays bare the consequences of racial prejudice, as do the following works for the stage:

*Othello* (ca. 1603), a play by William Shakespeare. In this brilliant tragedy, Iago plays on sexual as well as racial anxieties to undo the Moor of Venice.

*A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), a play by Lorraine Hansberry. In this landmark play, Walter Lee and Lena Younger face discrimination when they buy a house in a white neighborhood.

*Blues for Mister Charlie* (1964), a play by James Baldwin. This meditation on racism was written in the wake of the assassination of civil rights leader Medgar Evers.

*Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1967), a play by Derek Walcott. A metaphorical play in which the downtrodden consciousness of a colonized society is symbolized through the hallucinations of an aging charcoal vender named Makak.

*For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/ When the Rainbow Is Enuf* (1975), a play by Ntozake Shange. A hard-hitting poem/play about the experience of African American womanhood.

***Racial Critique*** Not all critics of apartheid, however, have appreciated Fugard’s works. Over the years, some have faulted him for his failure to denounce the system’s injustices in a more confrontational manner. His plays are open to multiple interpretations, and thus to controversy. For example, some Afrikaners believed the message of *The Blood Knot* was that blacks and whites could not live together peaceably, while some black critics called the work racist. Most now embrace the play as a sad commentary on the way racism has twisted and tangled our understanding of brotherhood and humanity.

Amid the racial polarization of apartheid, Fugard walked a fine line. Critic Jeanne Collier wrote in *Modern Drama* that “Fugard cannot write of Johannesburg or of township suffering without incurring the wrath of black South Africans who regard him as a self-appointed and presumptuous spokesman; nor can he claim value for the position previously held by white liberals without being assailed by the more powerful and vociferous radical left.”

***“Master Harold” . . . and the Boys*** One of many of Fugard’s plays to receive acclaim was “*Master Harold*” . . . and the Boys. Reviewing the New York production, Robert Brustein of the *New Republic* noted that “*Master Harold* seems to be a much more personal statement than his other works; it also suggests that his obsession

with the theme of racial injustice may be an expression of his own guilt, an act of expiation. Whatever the case, his writing continues to exude a sweetness and sanctity that more than compensates for what might be prosaic, rhetorical, or contrived about it.”

## Responses to Literature

1. Do you support Athol Fugard’s claim that he is not a political writer? Why or why not? What constitutes political writing? Who, in your opinion, is a successful political writer today? How so? Write a paper in which you explain your arguments.
2. How does the experimental nature of Fugard’s theater affect the content and tone of his plays? Create a presentation using classmates as actors to illustrate your findings.
3. Citing three or more of Fugard’s plays, write about the role that violence plays in his work. For what type of audience would this violence have an appeal?
4. In what ways does Fugard believe that white South Africans have been affected by the nation’s racial legacy? How does he demonstrate these effects? Write a paper in which you explain your arguments.
5. What can you learn about love and intimate friendship by studying *The Blood Knot*, *Boesman and Lena*, and “*Master Harold*” ... *and the Boys*? Create a presentation that demonstrates your findings.

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## John Galsworthy

BORN: 1867, Kingston Hill, Surrey, England

DIED: 1933, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Country House* (1907)

*Strife* (1909)

*The Dark Flower* (1913)

*The Skin Game* (1920)

*The Forsyte Saga* (1906–1921)

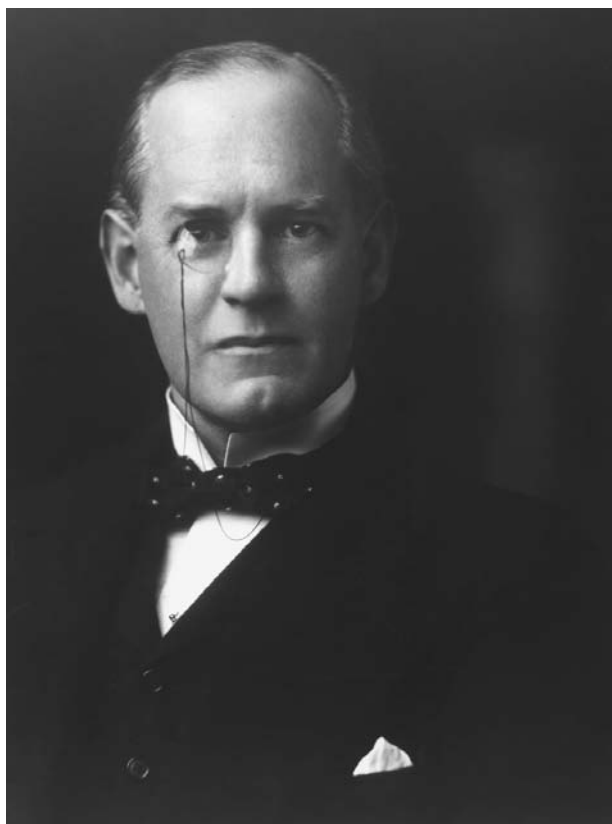
## Overview

English novelist and Nobel Prize winner John Galsworthy is best known for his literary series *The Forsyte Saga*, his portrayal of the British upper classes, and his treatments of social values. Also a dramatist, his reputation in his lifetime was second only to that of George Bernard Shaw. Through his plays, Galsworthy was a compassionate reformer who campaigned against long prison terms, harsh treatment of prisoners, class discrimination at the bar of justice, anti-Semitism, the intransigence of capitalists and labor union leaders, and other evils of society.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Life at Coombe** Galsworthy was born on August 14, 1867, at Parkfield, Kingston Hill, Surrey, England, the second child and first son of John Galsworthy and Blanche Bartleet Galsworthy. His father was a successful solicitor (attorney), company director, and property owner. When Galsworthy was still a child, his father moved the family to a huge home he had built on a large acreage called Coombe, near the village of Maldon. He called his house Coombe Warren, an estate that was to become a model for Galsworthy’s novels’ settings.

**From Preparatory School to Oxford Law** At the age of nine, Galsworthy was sent to the Saugeen Preparatory School, a boarding school in Bournemouth. Five



John Galsworthy Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

years later, he entered the prestigious Harrow School in London, where he excelled in athletics. In 1886, he went to Oxford University to study law, graduating with second-degree honors in 1889. The following year, he was called to the bar and began writing legal briefs for his father's firm. Galsworthy, however, had little interest in a legal career.

**Meeting Ada Galsworthy and Joseph Conrad** In 1891, at a family celebration of the marriage of Galsworthy's cousin Arthur Galsworthy, the author met the woman who came to dominate his entire life. That woman was his cousin's bride, Ada Nemesis Pearson Cooper Galsworthy. The marriage was a disaster for Ada, who later claimed that she endured marital rape and beatings. Although Ada became the model for Irene, Galsworthy's greatest heroine in *The Forsyte Saga*, her relationship with the author did not materialize until much later.

In 1891, Galsworthy's father sent him on an extended inspection tour of his mining interests in Canada, and during the next few years, he traveled widely. During a two-month voyage aboard the *Torrens* in 1893, he formed a close friendship with the first mate of the ship, Joseph Conrad, who was then at work on his first novel. Conrad later encouraged and guided Galsworthy

in his literary efforts. Between 1897 and 1901, Galsworthy published two novels and two volumes of short stories under the pseudonym John Sinjohn. The last of these works, *A Man of Devon* (1901), contains his first short story dealing with the Forsytes.

Ada next met Galsworthy in 1893, at the annual Eton-Harrow cricket match. Galsworthy was smitten. She told him about her miserable marriage, and, full of sympathy for her, he began to share her torment. They started to meet often, usually in the company of a female relative. Without her, Galsworthy might never have become a great writer. After she finally got a divorce and she and Galsworthy were married, in 1905, she aided him by typing manuscripts, listening to his work, shielding him from unwanted visitors, and lavishing affection on him. She managed their household and handled correspondence and appointments, thus helping Galsworthy to be a prolific writer. Most important of all, Ada was Galsworthy's muse.

**Critical Acclaim** After his father's death in 1904, Galsworthy began publishing under his own name and regularly produced novels for the next three decades. In 1906, the first Forsyte novel, *The Man of Property*, appeared, followed by what many critics consider his best non-Forsyte story, *The Country House* (1907). Also in 1906, his play *The Silver Box* was produced, and it met with favorable criticism.

Beginning in 1901, he wrote thesis plays (dramas that address and debate a social problem) for the next twenty-three years. Such plays as *Justice* (1910) effected real change. By revealing how harsh prison punishment destroys individuals, Sir Winston Churchill, then the home secretary in the cabinet, introduced sweeping prison reforms. Other important thesis plays included *The Fugitive* (1913), which focused on married women in extramarital affairs, and *The Mob* (1914), about morality and war. Such works were representative of the Edwardian age, named for the ruler of Great Britain, King Edward VII. Unlike the Victorian era that preceded it, the Edwardians critically questioned established mores.

During the First World War, Galsworthy donated the income from his writings to the war effort—including the profits from his last social satire, *The Freelanders* (1915), and the dramatic *Beyond* (1917)—and volunteered as a masseur in a Red Cross hospital in France. World War I began when Austro-Hungarian heir to the throne Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by a Bosnian terrorist in Serbia in June 1914. Because of diplomatic breakdowns and entangling alliances, what could have been a local skirmish in the Balkans between Austria-Hungary and Serbia soon engulfed nearly the whole of Europe and many other countries. Great Britain was a major player in the conflict, allying with France and Russia to form the Triple Entente against Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey. Much of the fighting on the Western Front took place in France, where trench warfare

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Galsworthy's famous contemporaries include:

**Joseph Conrad** (1857–1924): Conrad was a Polish novelist. He is best known for his novels *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and *Lord Jim* (1900).

**Wassily Kandinsky** (1866–1944): Kandinsky was a Russian printmaker, painter, and art theorist. He is considered the founder of the abstract painting movement.

**H. G. Wells** (1866–1946): Wells was an English novelist and nonfiction writer. He was one of the foremost science fiction writers in history and one of the first to write about time travel. One of his most famous novels is *The War of the Worlds* (1899).

**Laura Ingalls Wilder** (1867–1957): Ingalls Wilder was an American author. She was a popular writer of children's books with her early pioneer series, including the best-known *Little House on the Prairie* (1935).

**Florenz "Flo" Ziegfeld** (1867–1932): Ziegfeld was an American Broadway impresario. He is best known for his elaborate and expensive productions, such as the *Ziegfeld Follies* series of shows that ran from 1907 to 1931.

was common. After the United States joined the war on the side of the Triple Entente in 1917, the fighting ended in 1918, and the Treaty of Versailles was signed in 1919.

**Postwar Literary Success** As the war ended, Galsworthy's output of novels and short stories continued unabated. Outside of the World War I-influenced *Saint's Progress* (1919), *The Forsyte Saga* became his fictional focus. In July 1918, he conceived of, and began to implement, the idea of making *The Man of Property* the first volume of a trilogy that became *The Forsyte Saga*. The books that followed included the novels *In Chancery* (1920) and *To Let* (1921). When the whole of the saga was published in one volume, *The Forsyte Saga* in 1922, public reaction was immense: it sold more than a million copies in one year in both Great Britain and the United States. Following the success of the volume, Galsworthy wrote another Forsyte trilogy—*The White Monkey* (1924), *The Silver Spoon* (1926), and *Swan Song* (1928)—which did not prove as popular, though this did not deter him from starting a third trilogy that he did not complete.

**The 1932 Nobel Prize** In 1932, shortly before his death, Galsworthy was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. When he died on January 31, 1933, of what was believed to be a brain tumor, he was at the height of his popularity. Few other British writers—certainly not any of the modernists—had the power, prestige, or the vast reading public he had.

## Works in Literary Context

**Influences** Galsworthy's writing was summarily influenced by his surroundings and the people who inhabited them. His childhood memories of Coombe Warren and the beautiful surrounding countryside influenced his portrayal of Robin Hill in the Forsyte books. There were a great many relatives in his life, and it is apparent that the extended Galsworthy clan influenced the author's character constructs in *The Forsyte Saga* and several other novels.

His meeting Joseph Conrad gave Galsworthy the idea of becoming a writer, but the motivating force behind his writing was his wife, Ada. Her beauty and allure, Galsworthy's smitten state, and her suggestion that he write propelled Galsworthy from bored lawyer to energized writer. Moreover, her marital status in the Victorian era when marriage was truly for life, her undeniable love for Galsworthy, her beauty, and her courage in entering into an illicit relationship condemned by the society of which they were so much a part proved subject and theme for much of Galsworthy's literary output over his lifetime.

**Social Criticism** Galsworthy first achieved prominence as a dramatist. His most esteemed plays are noted for their realistic technique and insightful social criticism. While working for his father, Galsworthy collected rents from the tenants of London slum properties, and several of his plays examine the contrast between the rights of the privileged upper classes and the poor. In *The Silver Box*, for example, the son of a wealthy member of Parliament steals a purse from a prostitute. Later, the husband of one of the family's servants steals a cigarette box from the purse. While the wealthy young man is released, the servant's husband is convicted and sent to prison.

**English Values** In the early decades of the twentieth century, Galsworthy portrayed traditional English values, such as love of the countryside, fair play, integrity in business and other worldly affairs, devotion to justice, respect for women, harmony between the sexes, honorable behavior, support for the underdog, and the Victorian/Edwardian code of the gentleman and lady. Many of the books and stories included in the *Forsyte Saga* reflect these values as do such books as *The Country House*.

## Works in Critical Context

Though the reading public disagreed, modernist writers such as D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce scoffed at the traditional English values depicted in Galsworthy's works. The modernists considered Galsworthy and other Victorian/Edwardian novelists, such as H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett, mere sociologists whose literary depictions were unrealistic.

There was more respect among modernists for Galsworthy when it came to his vigorous satirizing of the upper middle class, with its snobbery, overpossessiveness,



and indifference to the working class and the poor of the land. Demonstration of this effective mocking can be found in the Forsyte Saga.

Although Galsworthy's dramas and novels were highly regarded during his lifetime, critical and popular interest in his works declined shortly after his death. In 1967 the British Broadcasting Corporation aired a twenty-six-hour serial adaptation of *The Forsyte Saga* for television. Repeated the following year and syndicated in more than forty countries around the world, this adaptation is credited with renewing interest in Galsworthy's novels. Today, Galsworthy is recognized as an important chronicler of English life, with Sanford Sternlicht praising his works as "the finest written portrait of the passing from power of England's upper middle class."

**The Forsyte Saga** The major literary achievement of John Galsworthy's life was *The Forsyte Saga*, a family epic that includes two trilogies of novels as well as several short stories. The saga satirizes upper-middle-class and upper-class British society in the Edwardian age and the immediate post-World War I period. With the saga, it was thought that something essentially English had been created. Critics bestowed great praise upon the author. According to one *Concise Dictionary of British Literary Biography* writer, critics lauded the trilogy for its "sweep and control" and proclaimed Galsworthy "a modern Thackeray." Still praising the series as well as Galsworthy's continued popularity in 2007, Allan Massie of the *Spectator* believed that the Forsytes remained popular "because one can argue about his characters as we do about our friends and acquaintances in 'real life.'"

## Responses to Literature

1. Galsworthy was immersed in themes of Victorian values. Go online to literary sites and databases and find one aspect of Victorian literature to investigate, such as Victorian literary style, Victorian writers, or the events and concerns that influenced Victorian themes. When you have printed out examples, return to share your new area of expertise with a group, so you can discuss how Galsworthy's works fit the genre.
2. Social class distinctions are an important part of Galsworthy's history and a major feature in his works. Research a particular incident where two classes are in opposition. What are the characteristics of each class? What is the core argument? Which "side" do you see more clearly represented in Galsworthy's writing? What characteristics of the class are evident in his satire?
3. Can you think of other family sagas that have been represented in popular literature or film? Come up

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also written on family and social class values:

*An American Tragedy* (1925), a novel by Theodore Dreiser. This book explores the troubles of young Clyde Griffiths, who is challenged by his rich-girl/poor-girl relationships.

*Leave it to Psmith* (1923), a comic novel by P. G. Wodehouse. In this work, the author makes fun of the British upper class.

*SubUrbia* (1994), a play by Eric Bogosian. In this play, slackers meander about as one of their friends flees suburban life and makes it big in Hollywood.

*The Virgin Suicides* (1993), a novel by Jeffrey Eugenides. In this quirky story, the narrator is a neighborhood boy who relates the sequential suicides of five sisters, the daughters of overprotective parents.

*Ordinary People* (1976), a novel by Judith Guest. In this book the affluent Jarrett family struggles to cope after a fatal sailing accident takes the life of the eldest son.

with a list and compare your findings with *The Forsyte Saga*. What do your examples have in common with the saga? How are they different? Write a paper with your findings.

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## ■ Mohandas Gandhi

BORN: 1869, *Probandar, Kathiawar, India*

DIED: 1948, *New Delhi, India*

NATIONALITY: *Indian*

GENRE: *Nonfiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

*Hind Swaraj* (1909)

*India on Trial* (1922)

*Satyagraha in South Africa* (1928)

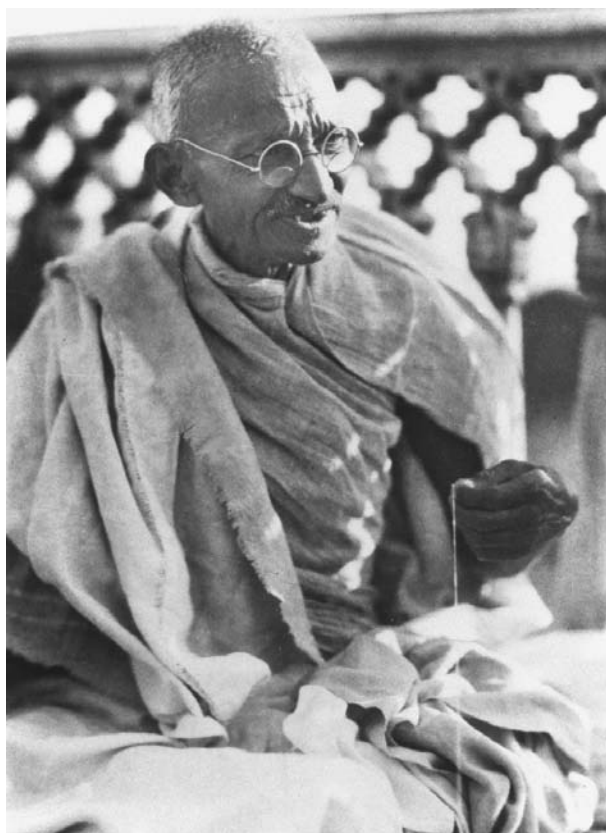
*Women and Social Injustice* (1942)

### Overview

The Indian independence leader Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, called the Mahatma (“Great Soul”) by many of his countrymen, changed the world far beyond his successful struggle to end British imperial rule in India. Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolent resistance to illegitimate authority and his mass civil disobedience campaigns introduced a new form of popular political struggle that has since been adopted around the globe, notably by the civil rights movement in the United States. Elaborated in his voluminous writings, the Indian leader’s religious and social convictions—centered on the ideals of tolerance, community, equality, simplicity, and self-sacrifice—are also prevalent in modern thought. Above all, Gandhi’s personal example of self-abnegation, his courage and perseverance, and his tolerance and humanity remain a source of inspiration to millions worldwide.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***Racial Discrimination in South Africa*** The son of a provincial official from the *Vaisya* Hindu caste, Gandhi studied law in England and struggled to overcome a painful shyness that threatened to end his career. His political initiation occurred in Natal, South Africa, where he went to work for an Indian company and found himself victimized by the country’s policies of racial discrimination. Gandhi refused to endure this treatment



Mohandas K. Gandhi *Gandhi, Mohandas K.*, photograph. AP Images.

passively and formed the Natal Indian Congress in 1894 both to champion the Indian minority’s political and civil rights and to press reform on the British colonial government. Supported by a thriving legal practice in Johannesburg, Gandhi founded the journal *Indian Opinion* in 1904 to rouse support for Indian rights. At the same time, he began exploring spiritually based paths to social change.

Gandhi’s innovative melding of political, social, and religious thinking led him to the key concept of *satyagraha*, or nonviolent resistance to illegitimate authority. He launched a mass civil disobedience campaign in Johannesburg in 1906 to protest the Transvaal government’s plan to register and better police the Indian population, and he continued to promote *satyagraha* until he returned to India eight years later. While Gandhi’s efforts to improve the plight of South African Indians produced few concrete gains, they did help bolster Indian confidence and self-esteem. Gandhi’s endeavors also encouraged South Africa’s oppressed black majority in its struggle for political and civil rights. The Indian leader described his South African campaign in *Satyagraha in South Africa*, published in 1928.

***Rise of Indian Nationalism*** The economic and political upheavals of World War I released a wave of

Indian nationalism. Following the 1918 armistice, the Rowlatt Acts of 1919 essentially continued the restrictions on civil liberties that had been imposed during wartime. In response, Gandhi launched the first nationwide civil disobedience campaign. Scattered violence, however, marred the strike and prompted a swift and brutal response from local British officials, culminating in the Amritsar massacre, which left four hundred Indians dead and twelve hundred wounded. Shocked and appalled by both sides, Gandhi called off the movement, but the massacre turned Gandhi, and millions of others, from ardent supporters of the empire into “pronounced opponents.” Nonetheless, he hesitated to fully exercise his influence lest violence break out again.

**Sentenced to Prison** Gandhi’s fears were confirmed by the events of 1920–22. Both politicizing his movement after the Amritsar massacre and using his overwhelming support from the lower classes—Hindu and Muslim alike by this point—Gandhi assumed the leadership of the moderate middle class–based Congress Party. He drafted a “Congress Constitution” defining the party’s agenda as the attainment of self-rule “by all legitimate and peaceful means.” He also reorganized the Party to maintain broad-based national support, breaking all ties with the British. In 1920, Gandhi rallied the nation in another campaign of limited noncooperation, but the campaign only provoked mass arrests and unrest. Encouraged by other Congress leaders, Gandhi was prepared to call a total strike in one province to paralyze the government. Just days before it was to begin, however, chilling news spread across India that a mob had burned a police headquarters, killing twenty constables. The news convinced Gandhi that his people were not yet ready for peaceful passive resistance, and he turned from political demonstration to social welfare programs in the villages, hoping to teach the self-control he believed was necessary for his campaigns to be successful. Nevertheless, Gandhi was arrested by the British in mid-1922 for “promoting disaffection,” and served two years of a six-year sentence before being released due to appendicitis. Ill and disheartened, Gandhi continued to promote self-control and peaceful solutions. It was during this period that Gandhi wrote *Story of My Experiments with Truth* in support of the Indian nationalist movement and nonviolent noncooperation.

The British continued to exclude the Indians from the process of political reform and administration of India. Frustrated with the slow pace of reforms, Gandhi reentered the political arena in 1928, urging Congress to launch another nationwide strike unless India’s demands for constitutional independence were met within a year. The British did not meet these demands. In consequence, Gandhi organized a symbolic demonstration of the Indians’ refusal to recognize the British government’s authority. The “Salt March” of 1930 was designed to disobey

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gandhi’s famous contemporaries include:

**Virginia Woolf** (1882–1941): This English novelist is one of the first writers to experiment with “free indirect discourse,” in which authors attempt to accurately represent the course of a character’s thoughts, through all its twists and turns.

**Emiliano Zapata** (1879–1919): A leading figure in the Mexican Revolution, Zapata led the Liberation Army of the South in a quest for social reform.

**Nayantara Sahgal** (1927–): An Indian author who writes in English, Sahgal is known for fiction that deals with India’s elite responding to the crises engendered by political change.

**Virginia Foster Durr** (1903–1999): Durr’s letters provide a firsthand account of southern life in the chaotic period of the American civil rights movement.

**Pablo Picasso** (1881–1973): Some people have called Picasso’s *Guernica* modern art’s most powerful antiwar statement.

the government’s heavily taxed monopoly on the manufacture of salt by marching to the coast and taking salt directly from the sea. Gandhi reached the sea in April, scooping up the first piece of natural salt himself, and calling on all Indians to emulate his actions in defiance of the government. Gandhi’s actions unleashed long pent-up emotions. Waves of protest and unrest swept across India and thousands were imprisoned. Gandhi himself was arrested again in May of 1930 and released again in 1931.

**Seeking Indian Unity** Although Gandhi was able to bring attention to some of India’s lowest castes, religious and ideological divisions continued to weaken the Congress party’s attempt to unite against the British. This lack of unity only confirmed the British belief that India was not ready for self-government. On the eve of World War II, the Congress party itself was divided between moderates and extremists, and the rival Muslim League, revived under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, advocated a separate Islamic state of Pakistan. The Congress declared its intention to boycott the war effort until independence was granted—a political miscalculation that gave the Muslim League a stronger voice in the self-rule movement, as it supported the British position. Gandhi, however, supported the Congress and in October 1940 called for a renewed *satyagraha* campaign, recruiting individual followers to “proclaim his resolve to protest the war nonviolently.” The usual pattern of arrests and releases followed.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The maxim “the pen is mightier than the sword” emphasizes the power that writing has to bring about change. In much of Gandhi’s writing, he attempted to achieve social change by describing his philosophy of nonviolent resistance. Gandhi’s use of literature to galvanize a revolutionary movement is part of a long tradition in which authors have counted on their words to aid a revolutionary cause. Here are some important works from other independence movements:

*Common Sense* (1776), a pamphlet by Thomas Paine. In 1776, Paine anonymously published this pamphlet calling for the American colonies to overthrow British rule.

*The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), a nonfiction account by Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu. Although Montesquieu died before the French Revolution, this philosophical treatise outlined the separation of powers within government, ideas important for revolutionary thinkers.

*Mein Kampf* (1925), a nonfiction piece by Adolf Hitler. At once both autobiography and political ideology, this text outlines some fundamental beliefs of the dictator.

Popular with the mass of the Indian population, Gandhi remained the spiritual leader of the independence movement. Yet, his political influence waned as the Hindu-Muslim split widened. His dream of a united India was quickly becoming politically impractical, and, while he continued to be consulted on national issues, his advice went largely unheeded by both the Congress party and the Muslim League. In 1947, the British resolved to transfer power to Indian hands. Gandhi hailed this decision as “the noblest act of the British nation” but elsewhere it unleashed an orgy of violence and bloodshed. A wave of religious violence leaving some 1 million dead followed the announcement that the land of India would be divided into a Hindu India and an Islamic Pakistan. Gandhi’s last days were spent fasting as he tried to quell the growing communal strife. The revered Mahatma became a victim himself in January 1948 when he was shot by a Hindu extremist. Millions worldwide mourned the violent end of a man who had always attempted to find peaceful solutions.

### Works in Literary Context

Some facts should be remembered when considering the writings of Gandhi. The first is their abundance. The standard set is the hundred-volume *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* published by the Indian government, with a great deal of this collection being composed of Gandhi’s daily correspondence. According to Raghavan

Iyer in his introduction to volume one of *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, “Despite the vast amount of proliferating literature on Mahatma Gandhi, there has yet been no accessible and coherent record of his essential writings. . . . [Gandhi’s] actual books were few, short and somewhat inconclusive. . . . His unfinished autobiography and several popular biographies remain the chief—and rather misleading—sources of public knowledge about the personality and impact of Gandhi.”

***Gandhi’s Translations Used to Support His Own Causes*** Gandhi concerned himself with making texts originally in English available to his countrymen. For example, he translated John Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* into Gujarati. In supporting equal opportunity, Ruskin offered an alternative to utilitarianism, which merely sought the good of the greatest number. Gandhi’s preface to his translation reflects his respect for Ruskin’s text and philosophy of adaptation: “since the object which the book works towards is the welfare of all—that is, the advancement of all and not merely of the greatest number—we have entitled these articles ‘Sarvodaya.’” Gandhi’s Gujarati adaptation was translated into English by Valji Govindji Desai and published posthumously as *Unto This Last: A Paraphrase by M. K. Gandhi*.

Gandhi attempted to create a society based on values unlimited by a religious past or a political present. This aim can be seen in his correspondence with Leo Tolstoy, which he translated into Gujarati. He reminded his readers of the values Tolstoy upheld, such as love, nonviolence, and independence of spirit. Gandhi hammered home the doctrine of passive resistance advocated by Tolstoy, who urged Indians to refuse to cooperate with the British government. It is hard to believe that the following words from the preface to Tolstoy’s “Letter to a Hindoo” are Gandhi’s selections from Tolstoy rather than Gandhi’s own voice: “Do not resist evil, but also yourselves participate not in evil. . . . A commercial company enslaved a nation comprising 200 millions. . . . Do not the figures make it clear that not the English but the Indians have enslaved themselves?”

***The Reluctant Autobiographer*** Gandhi began writing his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, in Gujarati in 1925, the same year he completed *Satyagraha in South Africa*. The first volume was published in 1927, the second in 1929. A single-volume edition was published in 1940 as *An Autobiography; or, The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Gandhi had reservations about autobiography as a form because of its Western heritage and thought the sense of permanence in such a work obstructed the development of both the subject and his readers. He negotiated these difficulties by pointing out that while his public life was known throughout the world, he alone knew the spiritual life that complemented it. This spiritual life comprised a series of experiments. Although conducted in the public domain, they were continuing applications of a personal

understanding of what constituted truth (*svaraj*). According to Gandhi, since the personal and the political are attempts to realize truth, they must be considered together as part of a single record.

Gandhi's purpose for writing was to support efforts to liberate India from British rule and to promote his belief in nonviolent resistance. Gandhi's body of work, both as a translator and as an author, was important while his career was active, but his impact on the American civil rights movement is virtually immeasurable. The literature of the 1950s and 1960s, combined with the practice of nonviolent protests—like sit-ins—were the hallmark of the civil rights movement, and all find their origins in Gandhi's teachings.

## Works in Critical Context

**Uncommon Commonsense** Gandhi suspended much of his activist work in the mid-1920s, although he remained very much in the public eye through his widely circulated writings. Two collections of articles on non-cooperation and the nationalist movement that originally appeared in the journal *Young India* were published during this period, and his *Story of My Experiments with Truth*, written during his years in prison, appeared in 1927. This last work “is extraordinary for candor and quality of self-criticism,” remarked *Los Angeles Times Book Review* critic Malcolm Boyd. Writing in the *Yale Review*, Merle Curti commented, “The book is without literary distinction, but it is, nevertheless, great . . . because of the supreme sincerity and humility with which Gandhi reveals his limitations and strength in his never-ending struggle to approach Absolute Truth or God.” *All Men Are Brothers: Life and Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi, as Told in His Own Words* was published with the support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). “To read this book is an education in itself,” *Saturday Review* critic Ranjee Shahani observed of the work. “Gandhi stands out in our murky era as a lighthouse of uncommon commonsense.”

## Responses to Literature

1. Both Emiliano Zapata and Gandhi were revolutionary figures, but each had a different view of how revolution was to be achieved. In fact, there have been a number of revolutions and attempted revolutions during the last three hundred years—the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the Mexican Revolution, to name but a few. Research a leading figure in one of these other revolutions and compare his or her basic approach to revolution to that of Gandhi's.
2. Look up the definition of the word “ironic.” Based on this definition, do you believe that it is “ironic”

for a person dedicated to nonviolent opposition to be assassinated? Why or why not? In the style of a newspaper editorial, explain your thinking.

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## Théophile Gautier

BORN: 1811, Tarbes, France

DIED: 1872, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

*Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835)

*Enamels and Cameos and Other Poems* (1852)

*History of Romanticism* (1874)

## Overview

Gautier's extraordinary worship of beauty—physical, tangible, intellectual, and even moral—colors his work across a multitude of genres. Gautier's importance as a writer comes from his strong belief that an artist should concern himself or herself only with portraying, to the best of his or her ability, the beauties of the art form itself. That belief became known in English as “art for art's sake” and influenced an entire movement of writers in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.



Théophile Gautier Imagno / Hulton Archive / Getty Images

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Boarding School, Artistic Studies, and Meeting Victor Hugo** Gautier was born in Tarbes, in southwestern France, on August 30, 1811. When he was three years old, the family relocated to Paris, where his father, Pierre, took a post as a government official. At the age of eleven, the boy enrolled in the Collège Louis-le-Grand; then, after an unhappy experience as a boarding student there, he moved as a day student to the Collège Charlemagne. There, he met Gérard Labrunie, later known by his pen name, Gérard de Nerval, who became his lifelong friend. During this period, Gautier began to study painting and to write poetry. In 1829, Gérard introduced Gautier to the already-famous Victor Hugo. Dazzled by Hugo's presence and position as leader of the new Romantic school, Gautier enthusiastically supported Hugo's theatrical endeavors with his flamboyant behavior at the premiere of Hugo's play *Hernani* (1830), a performance that marked victory in the campaign to gain critical respect for Romantic drama.

**Shocking the Bourgeoisie** Gautier was now part of the Parisian literary and artistic bohemia. With Nerval,

Pétrus Borel, and other would-be artists and writers, Gautier formed the Petit Cénacle, delighting in a boisterously defiant campaign to "shock the bourgeoisie." This group gradually merged into the so-called Groupe du Doyenné. New members joined in their free-living ways, their eager quest for critical recognition—on their own terms—and their continuing efforts to unsettle the middle class. Gautier was not above exploiting his bohemian associations. In *The Young-France, Stories in Jest* (1933), he evoked their escapades and their assaults on middle-class values, all the while poking fun at their more absurd eccentricities.

**Career as a Critic** In 1836, having already displayed a solid knowledge of art and artistic technique in occasional critical articles, Gautier found a post as an art critic for Emile de Girardin's new daily newspaper, the *Presse*. In 1837, with Nerval, he also began to share the duties of theater reviewer for the *Presse*. Gautier soon took over full responsibility for the theater column; every week for nineteen years, except for periods of absence now and then from Paris, he turned in to Girardin a review of current theatrical offerings.

Every spring, he produced a series of articles in which he critiqued the paintings and sculptures being exhibited in the annual Salon. Gautier held the two positions on the *Presse* until 1855, when he left his sometimes bumpy association with Girardin to take over the art and drama columns of the *Moniteur Universel*, the official newspaper of the French government. Here he remained until 1869, when he joined the new government-sanctioned daily, the *Journal Officiel*. His tenure there was short. With the German victory in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, the French empire fell and the *Journal Officiel* ceased publication. Two independent dailies, however, the *Gazette de Paris* and the *Commonweal*, were happy to employ Gautier; he was able to pursue his journalistic work until a few months before his death in 1872.

**Strained Familial Relations, Civil Strife, and Nostalgia** During Gautier's last years, journalism became ever more tiresome. His refusal to approve his daughter Judith's marriage in 1866 resulted in severely strained relations in his family. The Prussian siege of Paris in 1870 and the subsequent civil strife in 1871 brought physical trials, domestic displacements, fears for the safety of family members, and uncertainties in his professional life. His health was deteriorating. He sought escape not in exoticism, but in a nostalgic return to his festive days as a young partisan of the Romantic cause. He was writing his recollections of this happy time when he died on October 23, 1872. The unfinished *History of Romanticism* (1874) remains one of Gautier's most precious legacies.

## Works in Literary Context

Gautier holds an important place in French letters as a transitional figure between Romanticism and realism.



Beginning his career as an impassioned partisan of Victor Hugo, he ended his career as a close friend of Gustave Flaubert. Gautier's proximity to other artists within the Groupe du Doyenné and other literary circles significantly influenced the trajectory of his work.

**“Art for Art’s Sake”** Gautier’s rejection of an ideological mission in art and his call for a nonutilitarian outlook in the artist made him recognized as a leader in the “art for art’s sake” movement. His preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* stands as the principal manifesto of *l’art pour l’art*, with its uncompromising claim that art in whatever form has no other aim and no other morality than the creation of beauty.

**Exoticism in Attention to Detail** Indeed, one of the most evident features in Gautier’s writings is exoticism defined by an incredible attention to detail. It may be contemporary, as in his evocations of the countries that he visited, or may involve an imaginative reconstruction of earlier times, like the world of ancient Greece or the age of Louis XIII. Whatever the time or place, Gautier situates his reader in a palpable world. He uses his background as an artist to describe cities, with their buildings, their monuments, and their street scenes, in minute detail. He celebrates ceremonies, processions, and crowd scenes, not forgetting to pay close attention to the smallest seam on his characters’ clothing. In his language, he is careful to correctly employ the technical vocabulary particular to the specific time, milieu, or activity he is trying to effectively represent.

**Influence of Art for Art’s Sake** Gautier’s collection *Enamels and Cameos and Other Poems* went through an exceptional six editions in twenty years. Because of its visual inclination—its dedication to art for art’s sake—the collection inspired Charles Baudelaire to write his famous *Flowers of Evil*, released in 1909. Baudelaire dedicated his collection of poems to Gautier: “To the impeccable poet, to the perfect magician in letters, to my dear and revered master and friend Théophile Gautier, with the deepest humility I dedicate these sickly flowers.” When, at Gautier’s death, the editor Alphonse Lemerre invited contributions to a memorial volume honoring the author of *Enamels and Cameos and Other Poems*, no fewer than eighty contemporaries sent poems, among them the acknowledged greats of the day—Hugo, Charles-Marie-René Leconte de Lisle, Stéphane Mallarmé, and the English poet Algernon Charles Swinburne. Further, his doctrine of *l’art pour l’art*—art for art’s sake—is probably better known than Gautier himself.

### Works in Critical Context

Because of his exceptional flair for language, Gautier became one of the best-known authors of his day; his work, on the whole, was well-received and appreciated by

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gautier’s famous contemporaries include:

**Mark Twain** (1835–1910): American author, best known for his novels *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876).

**Victor Hugo** (1802–1885): French novelist and dramatist known for works like *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1832) and *Les Misérables* (1862).

**Emily Brontë** (1818–1848): English novelist whose *Wuthering Heights* (1847) remains a popular choice for film adaptation.

**Alexis de Tocqueville** (1805–1859): French historian who documented and commented upon the rise in equality among the classes and focused specifically on democracy in America.

**John Stuart Mill** (1806–1873): British philosopher who championed the rights of women, in addition to writing extensively in defense of his philosophical system, utilitarianism, which emphasizes the importance of providing the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people.

**Gregor Mendel** (1822–1884): Austrian chemist whose study of pea plants ultimately led to our understanding of genetics.

his contemporaries for its artistic merit. French poet and critic Charles Baudelaire praised Gautier for his imagination, style, and passion for beauty, calling him finally “a perfect man of letters.” Gautier put his heart into his creative works. Though sometimes criticized for ignoring plot and character, he was acknowledged as a stylist for whom the evocation of natural beauty was paramount. “I am one for whom the visible world exists,” he said, and for many modern critics this statement defines the limits of his artistic vision: His narrative coherence often suffers in order that he may give an exact description of a setting.

**Modern Criticism: Gautier’s Dehumanization of Art** Critic Raymond Giraud finds that Gautier’s dedication to art for art’s sake, distances the writer from some of the mundane and even painful realities of life. In his article “Gautier’s Dehumanization of Art” (1963), published in *L’Esprit Createur* he writes, “The [art for art’s sake] doctrine of impassiveness has its positive side, its strong conviction of the intrinsic value of art; but it also could be a doctrine of retreat from the painfulness of life.” Similarly, critic Hilda Nelson argues that Gautier’s handling of past and present in his fantastical novels serve to neutralize time, decay, and death, thus preserving in art the “dreams that men create for

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The art for art's sake movement in literature was a reaction against the then-popular belief that art, both visual and literary, must contain some kind of moral or religious message to be meaningful. The adherents of the doctrine believe that art should be produced simply for the sake of art itself and emphasize the beauty of the art form over its social usefulness. Gautier's extensive critical and creative output helped popularize this view, but he was neither the first nor the greatest producer of art created for art's sake. Here are a few examples of work produced by like-minded artists:

"The Poetic Principle" (1850, posthumous), an essay by Edgar Allan Poe. In this work, Poe argues that what people respond to most in poetry is not its message but the beauty of the poem itself, and that the best poem is written only for the poem's sake—a kind of precursor for the broader assertion that art should be produced for art's sake only.

*Flowers of Evil* (1857), a poetry collection by Charles Baudelaire. In this collection of poetry, as with many Baudelaire pieces, he conveys not the beauty of the world around him but rather vividly describes some of the vilest aspects of his subjects. As such, the text represents a different understanding of art for art's sake, one which strays into an overlapping literary movement called Decadence.

*Whistler's Mother* (1871), a painting by James Whistler. Whereas Gautier was often criticized for the excessive nature of his descriptions, this painting by Whistler, a strong proponent of art for art's sake, shows that beauty can consist of a simple portrait of one's mother.

"The Soul of Man Under Socialism" (1891), an essay by Oscar Wilde. In this work, Wilde argues that when an artist attempts to conform to what is expected from his or her art form—in this context, the moral or religious—rather than following his or her own muse, he or she thereby loses the title "artist."

*Eraserhead* (1977), a film directed by David Lynch. This cult film utilizes the peculiar ability of film to seamlessly move between the dream world and the "real" world of its main character and, like Gautier's work, focuses on the images it presents over its narrative. The film represents a distinctively modern interpretation of the art movement that Gautier and Poe started over a century before its creation.

their salvation and happiness." In her article "Theophile Gautier: The Invisible and Impalpable World: A Demi-Conviction" (1972), published in *The French Review*, Nelson writes, "Gautier, too, became aware that desires and fears, the limitations of time and space, death and disintegration, could be resolved in the creative act, art, and that art alone was capable of reproducing,

in permanent form, the dreams men create for their salvation and happiness."

## Responses to Literature

1. Gautier's work is often criticized for losing track of plot and action and, instead, favoring beautiful descriptions. Read *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. To what extent does this criticism apply to this novel? Explain your response in a short essay.
2. In a discussion with a group of peers, compare Gautier's expression of art for art's sake with David Lynch's in his film *Eraserhead*. How do the different media used to fulfill the doctrine of art for art's sake affect the artists' interpretation of the doctrine? In other words, what can Lynch do with film that Gautier cannot do with either his poetry or fiction, and vice versa?
3. Proponents of the art for art's sake movement felt that there was something disingenuous about expecting a piece of art to convey social, moral, or religious messages. Yet, many of our oldest and most revered stories contain just such morals—consider Aesop's "The Tortoise and the Hare." Using the Internet and the library, research the art for art's sake movement and some of the criticisms leveled against it. Then, in a short essay, briefly describe the opposing positions and offer your opinion about the disagreement.
4. Contrast the success of Gautier's poetic works with that of his theater criticism. Describe your emotional reactions to both.

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## John Gay

BORN: 1685, Devon, England

DIED: 1732, London

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Drama, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

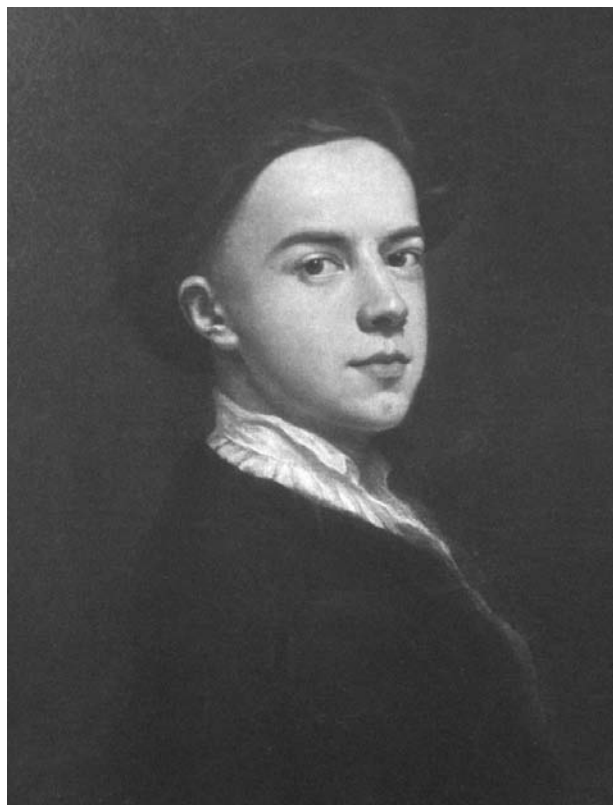
*The Shepherd's Week* (1714)

*Trivia: or, The Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1716)

*The Beggar's Opera* (1728)

### Overview

John Gay is best known as the author of the satire *The Beggar's Opera*. It was his greatest popular and critical success, and because of it, many people do not realize that he also excelled at poetry and musical lyrics. Gay's poetry questions the same things it asserts, telling the truth from behind a whole series of shifting, elusive masks. Both during his life and after his death, Gay was overshadowed by his friends Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, and his authorship has sometimes been questioned because of the influence these two men had on his work. Unlike Swift and Pope, however, Gay was a man of



John Gay Gay, John, photograph. The Library of Congress.

the theater whose main talent was his ability to unite words and music.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**From the Country to the City** John Gay was born in rural Barnstaple on the North Devon coast of England about June 30, 1685. Barnstaple was an important port, and Gay's family included tradesmen, clergymen, and soldiers. Because Gay was exposed to a broad range of people while growing up, he was well prepared to write about people of different occupations and social classes. After the death of his parents, William and Katherine Hanmer Gay, when he was ten, Gay lived with his uncle, Thomas Gay. He attended the local grammar school and was apprenticed to a silk merchant in London around 1702. His rural origins combined with this urban experience would prove significant, since he used both his knowledge of the English countryside and his understanding of the criminal side of London in his writings. Possibly because of poor health, Gay negotiated an end to his apprenticeship in 1706.

After a brief return to Barnstaple, Gay moved back to London and gained a position as secretary to Aaron Hill, a friend from school. Since Hill was involved in various literary projects, Gay began to make acquaintances in Hill's literary circles. He anonymously published his first poem during this time, a blank-verse parody of John Milton entitled *Wine* (1708), complete with drunken shifts in tone. Entertaining and lively, the poem alternates between ridicule and praise, foreshadowing some of his later poetry. Also during these years, Gay became lifelong friends with satirists Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift and met the composer George Frideric Handel.

In December 1712, Gay was appointed domestic steward and secretary to the duchess of Monmouth, widow of the duke executed in 1685 for an unsuccessful attempt at seizing the throne. Partly because of this position, Gay became known as an amiable hanger-on to the aristocracy. Published in January 1713, the first edition of *Rural Sports*, "Inscrib'd to Mr. POPE" mentions Gay's efforts to promote himself at court and to recommend himself to wealthy patrons. Gay called *Rural Sports* a georgic, suggesting a connection between this poem about country sports and Virgil's *Georgics*, a four-volume work about cultivating the land, growing vines and fruit trees, breeding animals, and keeping bees.

**First Successes** Gay's comedy *The Wife of Bath* was performed in May 1713. It was not a success, but one of its songs became popular. In fact, several lyrics and ballads from Gay's plays were successful, even if the plays themselves were less so. Gay's long poem, *The Shepherd's Week*, appeared in April 1714 and brought him the literary praise he had not yet received with his plays. Critic Peter Lawis calls this work "probably the most important

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gay's famous contemporaries include:

**Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685–1750): A German composer, Bach was better known as an organist during his lifetime; his masterpieces include the *Brandenburg Concertos*, the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, and the *Goldberg Variations*.

**Anne Bonney** (1698–1782): Bonney was an Irish pirate who left her husband and disguised herself as a man to join “Calico Jack” Rackham’s crew in the Caribbean.

**George Handel** (1685–1759): This German composer is best known for *Water Music* and the choral work *Messiah*.

**Robert Harley, First Earl of Oxford and Earl Mortimer** (1661–1724): English statesman and patron of the arts, Harley befriended Gay, Pope, Swift, and others.

**Alexander Pope** (1688–1744): Pope was an English poet and satirist whose literary satire earned him both fame and enemies.

**Jonathan Swift** (1667–1745): An Anglo-Irish satirist and poet, Swift horrified the public with “A Modest Proposal,” which suggested that the Irish poor should solve their financial problems by selling their children as food for the rich.

**James Stuart** (1688–1766): The son of the deposed King James II of England, Prince James tried unsuccessfully to claim the throne for himself. He was known as “the Old Pretender.”

Augustan contribution to the genre of pastoral.” Augustan writers of the eighteenth century admired Roman literature from the time of the emperor Augustus (reigned 27 BCE–14 CE) and imitated the works of such writers as Virgil, Horace, and Ovid, often drawing parallels between the two ages. Shortly after *The Shepherd’s Week* was published, Gay left the household of the duchess of Monmouth to become secretary to Lord Clarendon.

**Success—But Whose?** Gay described his *The What D’Ye Call It* (1714) as a “tragi-comi-pastoral farce.” With this work, Gay established himself as a satirical comedian and lyricist of formidable ability. Unfortunately, rumors began circulating that the work was written in part—or even principally—by Pope and John Arbuthnot, fellow satirist and physician to the royal court.

In an advertisement to the printed version of his next play, *Three Hours after Marriage* (1716), Gay acknowledged “the Assistance I have receiv’d in this Piece from two of my Friends,” and the assumption has always been that he is referring to Arbuthnot and Pope. This associ-

ation was no doubt good for the play’s quality, but it provoked a severe reaction from Pope’s enemies and in the long run damaged the play and Gay’s reputation for originality.

**Music and Lyrics** Around 1718, Gay and Handel collaborated to create the work *Acis and Galatea*, Gay writing the libretto, Handel the music. The concept of integrating words and music, of allowing the words to play against the music and the music against the words, is a difficult one for most writers to accept, much less master. It was performed privately at the palace of Handel’s patron, the Duke of Chandos, in 1718, but did not receive a public performance until 1731.

Although Gay held various court appointments through the years as his literary reputation grew, he never achieved success at court. He finally gained financial independence with the success of *The Beggar’s Opera*. It was performed sixty-two times, probably a record run in London at that time. Gay drew on English and French theatrical traditions, on the Italian comedy, on the folklore and slang of the London underworld for his drama, and on popular and formal music wherever he found it for his songs. Musical comedy in the form of ballad opera had arrived, allowing Gay to offer a mocking alternative to Italian opera.

He was prolific in his final years, writing a sequel to *The Beggar’s Opera* entitled *Polly* (1729), which was suppressed for political reasons, and leaving three unfinished plays upon his death from fever on December 4, 1732, at the age of forty-seven. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, next to Geoffrey Chaucer’s tomb. Observing the world around him with a most discerning eye, Gay had composed his own epitaph: “Life’s a jest; and all things show it. / I thought this once; but now I know it.”

### Works in Literary Context

Rather than laughing at trivialities by describing them in epic language as Pope does, Gay shows that high seriousness is not something completely different from the familiar and commonplace. Rather than using the language of mock epic to show how inappropriate some subjects are for epic treatment, Gay suggests that trivial things can be centrally important and that prestige alone is not a sufficient indicator of virtue or enduring value.

**Country and City Life** Gay’s experience with both country and city life is apparent in much of his work. His rural background is especially evident in *The Shepherd’s Week*, a pastoral farce that mocks the native pastoral as practiced by Ambrose Philips and criticized by Pope. Gay’s major poem *Trivia: or, The Art of Walking the Streets of London* is a mock-georgic. Although some scholars assert that *Trivia* may owe something to Jonathan Swift’s “Morning” and “A Description of a City Shower,” Gay’s work is far more than mere imitation or derivative: it demonstrates wit, vivid description, and



complex play with the conventions of pastoral, georgic, and epic poetry.

Modeled after Virgil's *Georgics*, *Trivia* is a georgic in the sense that it is a poem about how to do something. In addition to demonstrating the elements of the classical georgic form, which in this case is used to tell the reader how to survive in the city, *Trivia* is also an urban pastoral, the town poet's answer to the country poet of *The Shepherd's Week*. While *The Shepherd's Week* introduced the urban reader to country lore, *Trivia* turns the urban walker's experience into similar lore, applying pastoral elements of georgic work to an urban context. Undoubtedly, Gay applied the knowledge of urban life he gained while working as an apprentice in London.

**Ballad Opera** The idea for *The Beggar's Opera* seems to have been suggested by Swift, but Gay definitely proved his originality within the play. His lyrical talents, which he had been developing throughout his career, came to fruition, and an entirely new form of musical theater grew out of this work, the ballad opera. Ballad opera combines social satire, political satire, and literary burlesque just as Pope was combining the same ingredients in the first version of *The Dunciad* and Swift in *Gulliver's Travels*. Though the three works are seemingly completely different, they also are recognizably related.

Sven Armen states: "*The Beggar's Opera* is one of the masterpieces of rogue literature, and it shares with [Robert] Greene's pamphlets, [Ben] Jonson's London plays, and the novels of [Henry] Fielding, [Tobias] Smollett, and [Charles] Dickens an intimate knowledge of the methods and practices of the London underworld."

Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's great variation on Gay's theme, *The Threepenny Opera*, is certainly one of the most important pieces in twentieth-century musical theater—arguably the most important, but it has not displaced *The Beggar's Opera*. Gay's opera, furthermore, has an important relationship to Handel's "Italian" operas. Yvonne Noble has argued that it represents the rebirth of a specifically English opera tradition.

## Works in Critical Context

The traditional view of John Gay is that he was a poet whose personal virtues worked against his public success. Because he lacked the savage indignation of Swift or the sustained energy of Pope, he has often been regarded as the friend of great poets, but hardly as more than a secondary figure. Recently, scholars and critics have recognized Gay's expertise at lyric poetry at a time when epic and satire were most prominent and have begun to value his inventiveness. The habit of ascribing his work to others goes back to Gay's own time and is especially hard to combat because some of his works were, in fact, collaborative.

***The Beggar's Opera*** Bertrand Bronson calls *The Beggar's Opera* "a social commentary which, for all its surface playfulness, fulfills some of the profoundest ends of com-

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Although he had a gentler tone than some of his contemporaries, Gay satirized the government and society of his day. Here are more satirical works by other authors:

*The Great Dictator* (1940), a film directed by Charlie Chaplin. Released well before the United States entered World War II, this movie, starring Charlie Chaplin as "Adenoid Hinkel," satirizes Nazism and Adolf Hitler.

*The Satires* (first and second centuries CE), a collection of poems by Juvenal. The poems in these five books critique perceived threats to the Roman upper classes.

*Utopia* (1516), a novel by Thomas More. This novel, originally written in Latin, describes an "ideal" society that is rigid and totalitarian, where all challenges to uniformity are seen as threat.

edy. . . . He is simultaneously ridiculing a low society by decking them in all this borrowed finery. For burlesque has a two-edged blade, though both edges need not be equally sharp." According to Sven Armens, "*The Beggar's Opera*, in addition to being aesthetic criticism in its burlesque of the fashionable Italian opera, is also the social criticism of the poor man as artist. . . . Money thus forms the basis of social liberty and moral independence; its constant misuse in the town results in the distressing separation of human beings into economic abstracts of 'Haves' and 'Have-Nots.'" He continues, "Gay's satire on the professions is more concerned with the problems of honor and self-interest than the companion problems of justice and money. The point which Gay wishes to make is that just as the go-betweens, the bawd and the fence, should be the most reliable and dependable persons for their sort of business, so should professional men, such as lawyers responsible for justice, priests responsible for general morality, and statesmen responsible for the welfare of the whole society, be the most conscientious guardians of both the individual and the state entrusted to their care. But are they?"

## Responses to Literature

1. John Gay was a gifted collaborator. Have you ever collaborated with someone on a project or assignment? How did you make sure that your own voice was heard, and that the work and the credit were equally assigned? Would you do things differently another time?
2. John Gay gained a reputation as a "hanger-on" because he relied on other people's help to support himself financially. Do you think an artist should take



a “day job” to be financially secure, even if that leaves less time to create art? Or do you think it is better for them to rely on other people for financial assistance if that means they have more time to create?

3. Gay collaborated with Handel, widely seen as one of the great Baroque composers. If you could collaborate with any musician today, who would it be? Write an essay explaining whom you would choose and why.

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## ❏ Maurice Gee

BORN: 1931, Whakatane, New Zealand

NATIONALITY: New Zealander

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*A Special Flower* (1965)

*In My Father's Den* (1972)

*A Glorious Morning, Comrade* (1975)

*Plumb* (1978)

*The Scornful Moon* (2004)

### Overview

Maurice Gee is an award-winning author of fiction for both children and adults. His writings reflect a strong sense of New Zealand life, providing insight into his country's politics and ideals. He was little recognized outside of his native country until the publication of his novel *Plumb*, which won the 1978 James Tait Black Memorial Award. Gee's short stories are primarily by-products of his novels, and today they rank among the finest stories in New Zealand literature.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Childhood in New Zealand** Gee was born in 1931 in Whakatane, New Zealand. He grew up in the small town of Henderson, outside of Auckland. Gee was to use the simple town's environment for the setting of most of his future stories and novels.



Maurice Gee Gee, Maurice, photograph. Reproduced by permission.

Gee was educated at Henderson School, a public institution that also finds its way into many of his stories. From there, he entered Avondale College, where he took an MA in English in 1955. It was at college where he began writing and publishing short stories—the first of which, “The Widow,” was published in 1955 in the magazine *Landfall*.

In this time period, New Zealand was undergoing political change. In 1947, the country became completely autonomous from Great Britain. (New Zealand had been a colony of Great Britain, formally founded in the mid-nineteenth century.) As an autonomous nation, New Zealand became more intertwined with American foreign policy after the end of World War II and signed the three-way defense ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, United States) Pact with Australia and the United States in 1951. Later, New Zealander troops fought in both Cold War, anti-Communism conflicts in Korea in the early 1950s and Vietnam in the 1960s through early 1970s.

**A Writing Apprentice** Although Gee had always desired to be a writer, he took a job teaching in Paeroa after graduating, thinking this was the only way to make a living. But he did not care for teaching and spent every free hour he could writing. In 1961, he won a grant from the New Zealand Literary Fund and continued teaching and writing in England. The country Gee went to was being transformed as Great Britain was dealing with the impact of the loss of its empire as many of its colonies gained independence in the post-World War II period. As a result, the British economy was in decline at this time. For the next ten years, Gee learned to write—to find his writing voice, develop his style, and establish an

audience. He published eleven stories between 1955 and 1961, the years leading up to his first published novel in 1962.

**First Novels Published** Even though the mid- to late 1950s marked his apprenticeship, Gee's early stories still were considered significant. After "The Losers" and "Eleventh Holiday" established him as a serious writer and created an audience for him, he began writing novels. His first novel, *The Big Season*, came out in 1962. This was followed by two works that won New Zealand Literary Fund Awards of Achievement: *A Special Flower* (1965) and *In My Father's Den* (1972).

**From Librarian to Full-Time Writer** For several years, Gee held several jobs, among them a position as a librarian. Although the job added stability to his life, he found himself once again frustrated as all the books distracted him from his own writing. In 1976, he quit the library to write full time. That same year *Games of Choice* was published, followed by a series of novels for adults that marked for the writer a new level of literary accomplishment—an ambitious trilogy of novels about the Plumb family.

*Plumb* (1978) and its sequels, *Meg* (1981) and *Sole Survivor* (1983), have many ingredients of his earlier novels: With some religious and domestic flavor, the three books produce a saga on New Zealand life, focusing on its history and society succumbing to decay. The characters are outsiders and outcasts. They are defined by and ruined by idealism, materialism, and corrupt politics. These same kinds of characters reappeared in a number of other Gee novels, both for adults and younger readers, including *The Burning Boy* (1990), the Deutz Medal for Fiction-winning *Live Bodies* (1998), and the award-winning thriller *The Fat Man* (1994). By this time, New Zealand had developed a reputation for intense environmental concerns, including a 1984 ban on nuclear-armed vessels in its harbors, which damaged its relationship with the United States.

**Continued Success as a Novelist** In the early 2000s, Gee continued to publish novels for both younger readers and adults. In 2001, he published *Ellie and the Shadow Man*, for young adult readers, followed by two novels for adults, *The Scornful Moon: A Moralist's Tale* (2003) and *Blindsight* (2005). He continues to live and work in New Zealand.

### Works in Literary Context

Gee's stories are often set in fictionalized versions of his childhood hometown and the surrounding area, giving his stories a distinctive sense of place. The influence of Henderson and Henderson Creek have especially influenced Gee's novels, which are set in New Zealand's past

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gee's famous contemporaries include:

**Neil Armstrong** (1930–): American astronaut, professor, test pilot, and naval aviator, who, in 1969 was the first person to set foot on the moon.

**Kurt Vonnegut Jr.** (1922–2007) One of America's most respected, influential novelists, he is perhaps best known for his novel *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969).

**Elgar Howarth** (1935–): English conductor and composer, this former trumpet player has made significant contributions to brass band music.

**Toni Morrison** (1931–): Widely respected, she was the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Among her best-known novels are *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Beloved* (1987).

**Joe Orton** (1933–1967): English satirical playwright, he wrote risqué black comedies such as *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (1964) that shocked and amused his audiences.

**John Updike** (1932–): American writer of small-town, Protestant, white middle-class subjects, he has twice won the Pulitzer Prize, for *Rabbit Is Rich* (1981) and *Rabbit at Rest* (1990).

and through close observation chronicle how his country's politics and ideals have evolved over time.

### Fantasy Science Fiction

Science fiction also held appeal for Gee. His interest in writing fantasy science fiction began when he borrowed a book, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960), from a friend. His first effort in the genre is *Under the Mountain* (1979), the creepy tale of giant alien worms that live under an Auckland volcano and plan to turn Earth into a giant mud ball so it is more to their liking.

**Realist Style** Outside of fantasy science fiction writing, Gee's art and his vision have both developed out of the tradition of critical realism of Frank Sargeson and the other writers of that generation. As in Sargeson's stories, Gee's offer a clear-cut division between the more individualistic and imaginative outsider and the repressive puritan majority. For example, in "Eleventh Holiday," Gee pits the persecuted young Frank Milich against the middle-aged, middle-class "regulars" at Mayall's Cottage Resort. In Gee's stories, the characters are important as individuals responding to larger moral issues. They are important as vehicles of the themes; more important this way than they are as social "types." It is in the creation of character in its moral dimensions that Gee excels and earns his place as a significant contemporary writer of New Zealand critical realism.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Whether Gee's stories are set in his native New Zealand or in fantasy worlds, they carry universal themes concerning social and familial conflicts and the struggle of right against wrong. Here are a few works by writers who also wrote on themes of morality for characters who are outsiders:

*The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), a novel by J. D. Salinger.

This novel is a cult classic for its protagonist, the angst-ridden teenager, Holden Caulfield.

*Hadrian the Seventh* (1904), a novel by Frederick William Rolfe.

This novel features the eccentric, chain-smoking George Arthur Rose—in line for the priesthood but who becomes a candidate for the papacy.

*Of Mice and Men* (1937), a novel by John Steinbeck.

Although often placed at the top of censors' lists, this novel is profound in its exploration of mental and social disability.

*The Stranger* (1942), a novel by Albert Camus. In this existential novel, the protagonist, Meursault, is less than sympathetic from the start.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), a novel by Harper Lee. In this novel, human dignity is nearly destroyed but is restored when the humanitarian lawyer Atticus Finch goes to court.

## Works in Critical Context

Gee has been widely praised for his keen depictions of past and present New Zealand landscapes and societies as well as for his compelling, well-rounded protagonists and supporting characters. Fellow realist Maurice Shadbolt has praised Gee's work for the way in which it captures the "sight and sensation" of life in contemporary New Zealand. "Each of Gee's novels bountifully gives us a rich vision of some region and aspect of New Zealand life, and of human life in general," added a contributor to *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*. Gee has met with equally warm reception for his young adult literature, such as the "O" trilogy.

**The "O" Trilogy** Gee's "most ambitious fantasy work for young adults" is the "O" trilogy—composed of *The Halfmen of O* (1982), *The Priests of Ferris* (1984), and *Motherstone* (1985). The trilogy involves young protagonists who travel to a fantasy world to help restore the balance between good and evil. The character development and the treatment of the morality theme have prompted some reviewers to compare the trilogy to C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*.

While other reviewers have found flaws in the "O" trilogy, critics have not been quick to dismiss it as merely light reading. Karen Stang Hanley complained in *Booklist* that while Susan is a well-developed protagonist, the

other characters in the first book seem "vague" by comparison. However, many reviewers have found much to praise. Tony Ficociello from *School Library Journal* states, "Gee has created a unique environment and his story soars with excitement." David Bennett adds that "all fantasy readers will relish" *The Priests of Ferris*. "It is always tempting to approach this kind of book in a frivolous mood," concludes Marcus Crouch in a *Junior Bookshelf* review, "but this would be to misjudge a formidable talent. Maurice Gee . . . is a remarkable writer, who uses the conventions of the out-world romance both to tell a most compelling story and to make some valid social comments."

## Responses to Literature

1. Read Gee's book *Salt*. Write a review on the book, explaining the symbolism of the fantasy world and its inhabitants.
2. Research realism and critical realism as literary genres in order to come up with a working definition. In your definition, consider the following points: What are the characteristics of realism? What are the additional characteristics of critical realism? How do the two overlap? How does your favorite Maurice Gee story fit the definition?
3. Use the Internet or library and investigate New Zealand—its history, geography, culture, and people. In a small group, discuss how knowing more about New Zealand helps readers understand a Gee work.

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## Jean Genet

BORN: 1910, Paris, France

DIED: 1986, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Drama, Fiction, Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Condemned Man* (1942)

*Our Lady of the Flowers* (1944)

*The Maids* (1947)

*Prisoner of Love* (1986)

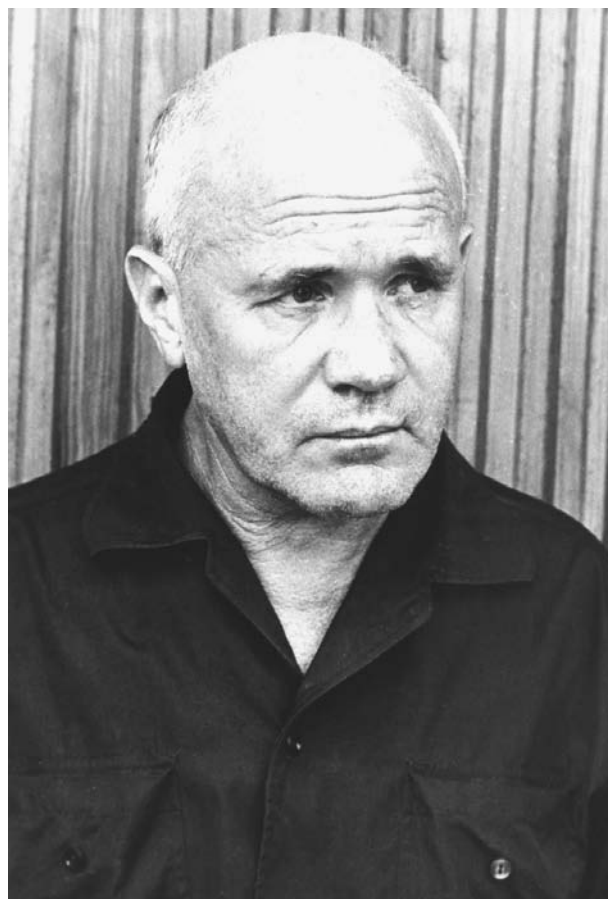
### Overview

Jean Genet is best known for surreal poetic dramas in which he utilizes the stage as a communal arena for bizarre fantasies involving dominance and submission, sex, and death. Genet, whom Jean Cocteau dubbed France's "Black Prince of letters," is linked to such amoral, antitraditional writers as the Marquis de Sade and Charles Baudelaire by his use of rich, baroque imagery, his deliberate inversion of traditional Western moral values, and his belief that spiritual glory may be attained through the pursuit of evil. Although Genet first won international recognition for his lyrical novels about prison life, most critics contend that his dramas represent the most refined synthesis of his characteristic style and themes.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**A Life in Prisons** Although the facts of Genet's life are so mixed with fiction as to be nearly indistinguishable, it is certain that he was born in 1910 in Paris. His father was unknown, and his mother, Gabrielle Genet, abandoned him at birth. As a ward of the *Assistance publique*, he spent his early childhood in an orphanage. As a young boy, he was assigned to a peasant family in the Morvan region of France. The foster parents, who were paid by the state to raise him, accused him of theft, and some time between the age of ten and fifteen he was sent to the Mettray Reformatory, a penal colony for adolescents. After escaping from Mettray and joining and being dishonorably discharged from the Foreign Legion (for his homosexuality), Genet spent the next twenty years wandering throughout Europe, where he made his living as a thief and male prostitute.

According to the legend, he began writing his first novels in jail and quickly rose to literary prominence. Having been sentenced to life in prison for a crime he did not commit, he received a presidential pardon from Vincent Auriol in 1948, primarily because of a petition circulated by an elite group of Parisian writers and intellectuals. After 1948 Genet devoted himself to literature, the theater, the arts, and various social causes—



Jean Genet Genet, Jean, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

particularly those of political underdogs, such as the Black Panther movement for equal rights for African Americans in the United States, or the Palestinian resistance to Israeli rule in the Middle East. He would later memorialize these experiences in his memoir, *Prisoner of Love*, published posthumously in 1986. Genet's early days of literary prominence, after the successful but humiliating conclusion of World War II (in which France was liberated—from both German forces and its own Vichy government, a puppet regime controlled by the Nazis—by Allied forces in 1944), were a time of both reconstruction and political instability in France, with the so-called Fourth Republic having more than twenty-one prime ministers over the course of the twelve years of its existence.

**Poetry, Novels, Plays... and One Fictional Autobiography** It is frequently noted of Genet that his development as a writer was from poetry to novels to plays. According to the legend, his initial creative effort was a poem written in prison, and, in fact, his first published work was his poem *The Condemned Man*. Between 1942 and 1948, Genet proceeded to write four major novels and

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Genet's famous contemporaries include:

**Fritz Hochwaelder** (1911–1986): An Austrian dramatist whose work was affected by his brush with the Nazis prior to World War II.

**L. Ron Hubbard** (1911–1986): An American science fiction author who also founded the controversial Church of Scientology.

**Chinua Achebe** (1930–): A Nigerian novelist, poet, and literary critic, Achebe is perhaps the most significant African writer in English of the twentieth century.

**Frida Kahlo** (1907–1954): A Mexican painter whose work includes elements of several schools of art, including Surrealism and Symbolism.

**Dominique Pire** (1910–1969): The Belgian monk whose efforts in helping World War II refugees earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1958.

**Yitzhak Rabin** (1922–1995): The Israeli prime minister who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 and was assassinated in 1995.

one fictionalized autobiography. He also wrote two plays, of which one, *The Maids*, was produced by Louis Jouvet in 1947. And while Genet went on to make two films between 1949 and 1956 (*Imaginations* and *Song of Love*), his most successful theatrical period was from 1956 to 1962. During that time, he wrote and presented three plays—all successful productions. Various ballets, mimes, films, aesthetic criticism and sociopolitical statements were interspersed throughout his years of productivity, from about 1937 to 1979. Weakened by ill health, Genet published little after 1979. He was found dead on the floor of his Paris hotel room on April 15, 1986, and buried in the Spanish cemetery in Larache, Morocco.

### Works in Literary Context

Genet's work is most fruitfully viewed in terms of its subversion of both traditional structure and heteronormative themes. Indeed, his novels—which lack traditional chronology and smooth transitions—have been linked with a movement in literature called the “new novels.” “New novelists” attempted to rethink the traditional structure of the novel in order to reflect the increasingly complicated human psyche in the post–World War II era. In addition to experimenting with the form of the novel, Genet also opened that form up to what has been called “homosexual eros.” That is to say, not only does Genet invert traditional conceptions about the structure of the novel, he also challenges the perspective that heterosexuality is or should be “normative” or dominant.

**The “New Novelists”** Of Genet's five novels, counting the fictionalized autobiography, *The Thief's Journal*, critics consider *Our Lady of the Flowers* and *The Miracle of the Rose* to be his best. His first novel was brought to Jean Cocteau's attention by three young men who had become acquainted with Genet, who was then selling books (some stolen) from a bookstall along the Seine. Cocteau recognized the literary merit of *Our Lady*, which is a tour de force. This novel is unique for several reasons: its basic philosophy, its sophisticated literary technique, and its composite central character Genet-Divine-Culafroy. Genet's works, like those of the well-known “new novelists” Alain Robbe-Grillet and Michel Butor, may be considered nontraditional in their disregard of conventional psychology, their lack of careful transitions, their confused chronologies, and their disdain for coherent plot structures.

**Homosexual Eros and an Ethic of Evil** Genet's novels, which are fraught with exotic imagery and metaphors, French slang, and scatological language, all take the form of non-chronological, semiautobiographical narratives that alternate between the first and third person. According to Richard Howard, Genet's novels “are the great affair in his career primarily because they are the first and perhaps the only texts to set forth for the Western imagination an explicit realization of homosexual eros.” By rejecting the morality of what he perceives to be a repressive, hypocritical society that punishes its least powerful social castes for crimes universal to all classes of humanity, Genet seeks to create in his literature what Sartre termed in his influential study, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, “a black ethic, with precepts and rules, pitiless constraints, a Jansenism of evil.” In his first novel, *Our Lady of the Flowers*, Genet inverts traditional Western values to replace ideals of goodness with ideals of evil, courage with cowardice, love with betrayal. Thus, evil is transformed into good, suffering into joy, and shame into glory. The book, described by Sartre as “the epic of masturbation,” was written beneath a blanket in Genet's cell at the prison of La Fresne. Through his fantasies, Genet describes the loving revenge of a submissive homosexual prisoner, Divine, on his dominant pimps and cellmates, Darling and Our Lady, whom he resents supporting through male prostitution. Genet ultimately deems Divine's betrayal of Our Lady, a murderer whom Divine delivers to prison officials for execution, to be a tribute to supreme evil. By betraying his lover, Divine is able to identify with both victim and executioner and to assume the universal burden of criminal responsibility.

**Granddaddy to the Beats** Given Genet's open discussion of homosexuality and his refusal to conform to the conventions of the novel, it is fair to say that his work opened the door for the success of a number of Beat writers, antiestablishment American writers who rose to prominence in the 1950s. If American poet Allen



Ginsberg has been described as the Father of Beat literature, Genet must surely have been its Granddaddy. Beat writer Jack Kerouac's famous autobiographical novel, *On the Road*, certainly benefited from Genet's groundbreaking work, and William S. Burroughs, for example, wrote openly both about bisexuality and drug use in his novel *Naked Lunch*, a work held together only thematically—there is no clear chronology and the characters that inhabit the pages are connected to one another in only the smallest of ways.

### Works in Critical Context

Genet's early success as a novelist may certainly be attributed to various factors—to the support of Jean Cocteau and Jean-Paul Sartre, to the scandal arising from his subject matter, and to his notoriety as a thief and novelist. The critics long continued to accept the simplistic legend of the unlettered convict genius despite the classical references and other literary allusions, the sophisticated structures, and the sheer volume of work purportedly created between 1942 and 1948. The legend persisted until 1970 when Richard N. Coe published, in *The Theatre of Jean Genet: A Casebook*, an essay by Lily Pringsheim in which she reported that the Genet she had known in Germany in 1937 was of “a truly astonishing intelligence. . . . I could scarcely believe the extent of his knowledge of literature.” She also revealed that Genet begged her “to store away a number of manuscripts . . . and that he shared [with her friend Leuschner] an uncontrollable thirst for knowledge, for Leuschner, like Genet, carried books about with him everywhere he went: Shakespeare, language textbooks, scientific treatises.”

Early critical response, then, was focused on Genet as a person, but in recent years, critics have shifted their focus from the man to the work and have affirmed the complexity and beauty of Genet's themes and the intricate structure of his novels. The diversity of the critical response to Genet is best illustrated by an examination of the body of work that seeks to explain and judge his novel *Our Lady of the Flowers*.

***Our Lady of the Flowers*** Francis L. Kunkle in his *Passion and the Passion: Sex and Religion in Modern Literature* is representative of those critics who reject Genet's work; Kunkle finds *Our Lady* to be “a kind of endless linguistic onanism which often collapses into obscene blasphemy.” Most critics, however, consider *Our Lady* innovative in its treatment of time and its concept of gesture-as-act, and sophisticated in its self-conscious aesthetic. In *Jean Genet: A Critical Appraisal*, Philip Thody defends the worth of the book: “There are a number of reasons for considering *Our Lady of the Flowers* as Genet's best novel, and the work in which his vision of reality is given its most effective expression. It has a unity which stems from its concentration upon a single character, and Genet's projection of his own prob-

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Genet's work was notable for its open treatment of homosexuality. Here are some more books and films dealing with homosexual themes:

*The Charioteer* (1959), a novel by Mary Renault. This historical novel offers a bold, unapologetic portrayal of male homosexuality during World War II and stands as a classic work of gay literature.

*The Dying Gaul* (2005), a film directed by Craig Lucas. In this film—based on a play by the same name—a young homosexual screenwriter enters a sexual relationship with a movie producer in part, at least, to gain favor with him in order to get his film made.

*Long Life* (2004), a series of essays by Mary Oliver. In this collection of essays, Mary Oliver explores the meaning of her long life in terms of her homosexuality, her ecological concerns, and her career as an author.

*Howl* (1956), a poetry collection by Allen Ginsberg. This collection of poems describes frankly, among other things, the pleasures of homosexual love; for that frankness, its author was charged with obscenity and threatened with prison time.

lems on to Divine creates a detachment and irony that are not repeated in any other of his works.”

### Responses to Literature

1. Read *Our Lady of the Flowers*. Genet's work has been described as nontraditional in its presentation of chronology and its transitions from scene to scene. How would you describe your reaction to these facets of this novel? In what ways does Genet's structure, meant to represent the fracturing of the human psyche in the wake of two World Wars, continue to speak to the modern experience of selfhood? In what ways might it be obsolete?
2. Little is known for sure about Genet's life. What exists is a set of legends designed to support an image of the author as a lonesome, self-taught, underprivileged genius. Since so much was made of this legend during his lifetime, his work was often interpreted in terms of it. After having read *Our Lady of the Flowers* or one of Genet's other novels, do you think you would respond differently to the text if you knew that Genet had lived a privileged, bourgeois life? Is it fair to judge the effectiveness of a work based on the biography of its author? Write an essay supporting your position on this issue.
3. Research the “new novelists” on the Internet and in the library. In your opinion, in what ways does

Genet exemplify the beliefs of those who follow this tradition, and in what ways does Genet's work represent some other literary trend or movement? Analyze examples from Genet's work to support your response.

4. At the time of publication, Genet's work was seen by many as immoral and, for that reason, flawed. Is "morality" an appropriate category for judging the quality of a literary work?

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## ❏ Hsaddullah Khan Ghalib

BORN: 1797, Agra, India

DIED: 1869, Delhi, India

NATIONALITY: Indian

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Divan-i-Ghalib* (1841)

*Panj ahang* (1849)

*Dastanbu* (1858)

### Overview

Hsaddullah Khan Ghalib is regarded as the most important Urdu-language poet of the nineteenth century. He is praised in particular for his artful use of the short lyric



Hsaddullah Khan Ghalib Writer Pictures / drr.net

form known as the *ghazal*, although he also wrote numerous volumes of letters and an account of the Sepoy Rebellion, in which Indian natives attempted to overthrow British colonial rule.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***An Orphan at Age Five*** Ghalib was born into an aristocratic Muslim family in Agra. Orphaned at age five, he was reared with his brother and sister by maternal relatives. Ghalib started writing poetry in both Urdu and Persian as a child. At age thirteen, he married and moved to his wife's home in Delhi, where, except for occasional travel, he resided the rest of his life. There he made the acquaintance of several prominent and influential poets and wrote both occasional and lyric poetry for patrons at the Mughal court. In 1827 Ghalib went to Calcutta on legal business and met a number of writers and scholars in that city and in Lucknow, gaining him admittance to the literary world outside of Delhi.

***Breaking with Tradition*** While in Calcutta, Ghalib observed the material prosperity of British civilization and attributed this wealth to English academic and legal innovations. Thereafter, he began to challenge Indian institutions, especially the practice of educating Muslims in a dialect of Persian that varied from the traditional language in both vocabulary and grammar. Ghalib argued that Indians should write Persian as native speakers wrote it, and he presented his ideas at a symposium held

by the university at Calcutta. Ghalib's audience strongly criticized the unfamiliar style of Persian he was espousing, prompting him to condemn his opponents in Calcutta newspapers. His challenge to Indian tradition and his outspoken nature provoked animosity among many of Ghalib's colleagues and involved him in a lifelong controversy. However, the quarrel also brought him greater attention, and the resulting correspondence with other scholars established his reputation as both an innovative writer and an uncompromising scholar.

**Rethinking Rebellion** In 1841 Ghalib published his collected Urdu poems, *Divan-i-Ghalib*. His next book did not appear until 1849, when he produced *Panjahang*, a handbook on the writing of letters and poetry illustrated with samples of his own work; throughout the next decade, he published only sporadically. Since the sixteenth century, India had been occupied by traders from various nations in Europe, many of whom hoped to colonize the land. By 1856, the majority of India was under the control of the British East India Company. In 1857 Ghalib was forced to reassess his great admiration for Western culture when the British rulers of India responded to the Sepoy Rebellion with bloody violence. Known as the "First War for Independence" in India, this rebellion marked a transfer of governing power from the British East India Company to the British Crown. Eighteen months after the start of the fighting, Ghalib published *Dastanbu*, his memoirs of the suffering brought on by the conflict, sending copies to various British officials, including Queen Victoria, both to plead for moderation in the treatment of Indians and to establish his own innocence in the rebellion. Motivated by the realization that most of his unpublished manuscripts had been destroyed when the rebels and British alike had looted the libraries of Delhi, Ghalib attempted to gather his remaining *ghazals* into expanded editions of his *Divan*. In the loneliness caused by the deaths and exile of many of his friends, Ghalib began to write several letters a day for solace; many of these were collected for publication. Despite rapidly failing health in his later years, Ghalib helped edit some of these collections, as well as critiquing poems sent to him by poets all over India. He died in Delhi in 1869.

## Works in Literary Context

**The Ghazal** Ghalib's experience of cultural differences between the East and West heavily influenced his work and linguistic preferences. In addition, his competition with and respect for Mohammad Ibrahim Zauq, a prominent contemporary of Ghalib's, played a significant role in the development of his work. Although Ghalib wrote in several genres, his *ghazals* have generally been the best received of his works. *Ghazals* usually consist of five to twelve couplets that are linked by common meters and rhyme schemes, but not necessarily by subject matter or

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ghalib's famous contemporaries include:

**Washington Irving** (1773–1859): Best known for his stories "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," Irving offered a turn to tradition and folklore reflective of an uneasy acceptance of the great changes of the early nineteenth century.

**Benoit Fourneyron** (1802–1867): Fourneyron was a French engineer who designed the first usable water turbine. In making it possible to capture energy from moving water, he played a particularly key role in the development of industry and industrial machinery around the world.

**Mohammad Ibrahim Zauq** (1789–1854): Zauq was a contemporary and rival of Ghalib's and served as tutor to the emperor of India. The two poets, while exchanging periodic jibes, apparently had a mutual respect for one another's abilities.

**Abraham Lincoln** (1809–1865): Lincoln, the sixteenth president of the United States, was perhaps the most powerful antislavery advocate of all time. He pushed for and signed into law the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which abolished slavery. He was assassinated shortly thereafter.

**Charles Darwin** (1809–1882): Darwin was an English naturalist whose theory of natural selection as a mechanism for evolution revolutionized the natural sciences. Spin-offs on his work, most notably by Herbert Spencer, who proposed a theory of social Darwinism, helped the British to justify their racist colonial enterprises to themselves.

tone. They were written in both Urdu and Persian, although Persian poetry generally brought greater prestige. As a young man, Ghalib preferred to compose in Persian—which had a similar status to that of Latin in Western Europe of the Middle Ages—until he noticed a growing taste for Urdu verse among Delhi poets. From the 1820s onward, he composed increasingly in Urdu, and now is remembered chiefly for his Urdu writings. Critics remark that Ghalib expanded the range of themes of the *ghazal* genre and utilized conventional Persian and Urdu poetic devices in new ways.

**Expanding the Boundaries of Language** A nightingale singing in a garden for love of a rose was a common metaphor for a poet composing his works in response to a beloved, but unattainable, woman. Ghalib used the same allusion to suggest his interest in progress and modernity: "My songs are prompted by delight / In the heat of my ideas; / I am the nightingale / Of the

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Loss and grief are, in many ways, classical literary themes. The world changes, and with that change, much that has been solid and known melts away. The ability to capture lyrically personal and shared responses to shifts in the surrounding world has long been a hallmark of great poetry and fiction alike. Here are some other authors writing in response to historical change and loss:

*In Search of Lost Time* (1913–1927, translated 2002), a novel by Marcel Proust. French author Proust's epic seven-volume novel meditates on the nature of time and memory and is shot through with grief and loss. The personal difficulties of physical infirmity and the cruelty of others are interwoven with the social catastrophes of World War I and the aerial bombardment of Paris.

*Austerlitz* (2001), a novel by W. G. Sebald. Contemporary German author Sebald ties together a man's sorrowful search for memories of his father with the brutal and sickening history of the Holocaust throughout Western Europe.

*The Bell Jar* (1963), a semiautobiographical novel by Sylvia Plath. In this work, American poet Plath chronicles her own experience of bottomless grief and depression, in part a response to her encounter with the teeming busyness, but also hopelessness, of New York City.

flower garden of the future." By identifying his symbolic beloved with a future age, Ghalib stressed his interest in change. He broke more strongly with established literary practice in his letters. Educated Indian Muslims usually wrote letters, as they did poetry, in Persian rather than in Urdu, while Ghalib wrote increasingly in Urdu. Moreover, in either language, letter writers customarily employed rhyming sentences and addressed their correspondents with flattering epithets. In place of such formality, Ghalib substituted colloquial language and nicknames or terms of endearment like "brother." His letters proved so popular they were adopted as models by subsequent writers of Urdu. Today, scholars and artists look to Ghalib's work for indications of the cultural and political climate in India during the nineteenth century. Ghalib's on-going influence can be seen in the presence of films, plays, and a television series based on his life and work.

### Works in Critical Context

Highly regarded for his contributions to the development of Urdu poetry, Ghalib was virtually unknown outside Urdu-speaking communities for decades following his death. His work, however, gradually came to the attention of Western readers, and the centenary of his death in

1969 was marked by several volumes of English translations of his poems, with critical notes and biographical essays. Recent scholars have focused in particular on his handling of *ghazal* stylistic conventions and his contribution to the development of Urdu literature, and they agree that his extraordinary skill as a lyric poet makes him one of the most prominent figures in nineteenth-century Indian literature.

Writing in an era of colonial crisis and traumatic change in India, "Ghalib was not," as Aijaz Ahmad writes, "in the modern sense, a political poet—not political, in other words, in the sense of a commitment to strategies of resistance. Yet, surrounded by constant carnage, Ghalib wrote a poetry primarily of losses and consequent grief; a poetry also of what was, what could have been possible, but was no longer." It is important to note that his thematic focus on loss and sorrow coincides with a commitment to progress. That latter was perhaps most strikingly evidenced in his renewal of older themes and his investment in the Urdu language, then seen as the lesser cousin to Persian.

### Responses to Literature

1. Read several of the *ghazals* in *Divan-i-Ghalib*. In your opinion, what are the crucial elements in Ghalib's portrayal of loss and sorrow? Think about the symbolism and word choice in the poems. Be sure to cite and explain specific examples from the text.
2. Research the use of the Persian and Urdu languages in India. Does the use of one language over the other suggest a certain social standing? Why do you think Ghalib chose to work in Urdu in his later life?
3. As you read through Ghalib's work, recall that you are reading Urdu texts in English translation—and that translation is always a process of interpretation. Pick three to five terms that seem crucial to you in one or two of the *ghazals*, and look back to the original Urdu texts. Now, find other possible translations of those terms. How might the meaning of the poem be different for you if the terms were translated in different ways? What does this suggest about the ways in which we experience and share meaning? What does it tell you about translation?
4. Research the Sepoy Rebellion. What caused this violent uprising, and how did it end? How did Ghalib use this real-life event as inspiration for his book *Dastanbu*?

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## Michel de Ghelderode

BORN: 1898, Ixelles, Belgium

DIED: 1962, Brussels, Belgium

NATIONALITY: Belgian

GENRE: Drama, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Farce of Death Who Almost Died* (1925)

*Chronicles of Hell* (1929)

*The Public Life of Pantagléize* (1930)

*Red Magic* (1931)

*The Actor Makes His Exit* (1935)

### Overview

Michel de Ghelderode was among the most influential twentieth-century dramatists working in French, earning an international reputation as an avant-garde playwright. Although he lived his entire life in his native Belgium, Ghelderode achieved his critical and commercial success in Paris. His plays are often set in surreal, dystopic fantasylands, peopled by grotesques, dwarves, and marionettes; nevertheless, they exhibit psychological realism. Although he sometimes achieved notoriety through scandal, Ghelderode felt he never received the recognition nor achieved the financial success he deserved.



Michel de Ghelderode Association internationale Michel de Ghelderode

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**French Beginnings** Ghelderode was born Adolphe Adhémar Martens in Ixelles, Belgium, on April 3, 1898. He was the fourth child of middle-class parents Henri-Adolphe Martens, a clerk at the general archives at Brussels, and Jeanne-Marie. Although they were Dutch speakers, the Martens chose to educate their children in French, the only official language of Belgium at the time. In fact, Ghelderode published all of his works in French, apparently never mastering written Dutch.

**Early Illnesses** Martens attended school at the Institut St-Louis in Belgium until 1914, when he was forced to leave after a bout with typhus (an infectious bacterial disease that was regularly epidemic until a vaccine was created in the 1930s). His adolescence was deeply affected by his illness and the death of his brother in World War I. Though the war had its immediate causes in eastern and central European politics and entangling alliances, Germany's invasion of Belgium in August 1914 brought Great Britain into the conflict. Though the Belgian army tried to resist, Germany occupied much of Belgium during World War I. Belgium proved to be a major battleground on the Western Front as the Allies—Great Britain, France, and Belgium, among others—sought to liberate the country.

Martens attempted suicide at least once and was never entirely stable. He became something of a hypochondriac, always suffering from one ailment or another. Because of chronic asthma, he left school early and for the rest of his life lived as an invalid.



***The Devil, Damnation, and Death*** Raised by a mother who fervently believed in both God and the devil (whom she claimed to have personally seen), Ghelderode was told supernatural tales from an early age. When he began to read, stories of the macabre and fantastic were his favorites. When he began to write—short stories and poems, then plays—he continued his preoccupation with those subjects.

In 1916, Ghelderode developed an interest in the marionette (stringed puppets) theaters of old Brussels, searching their records for lost or forgotten plays. Some of his own plays are reportedly based on or inspired by old marionette dramas of the sixteenth century. In 1918, a representative from a local group of avant-garde writers and artists approached Ghelderode and invited him to give a lecture. Ghelderode accepted but stated that his lecture would have to deal with American Edgar Allan Poe's work. To accompany the lecture, the arts group asked Ghelderode if he had an appropriate short play they could perform. Although he had never written a play before, Ghelderode said that he had a suitable play, then quickly wrote one. The resulting work was *Death Looks Through the Window* (1918)—a horrifying play with physically or morally defective characters and an ending in “hell and damnation,” as Ghelderode later described it.

***New Politics, New Work*** By 1923, Ghelderode was working as the archives editor in Schaerbeek, a suburb of Brussels. His lifelong interest in old manuscripts was fostered by this position. During the 1920s, Ghelderode also continued his theatrical efforts, writing puppet plays usually based on biblical stories. These plays also included *The Death of Doctor Faust* (1926) and *Don Juan* (1928). When audience reaction to these French language works was not enthusiastic, he turned to the Flemish People's Theatre. The theater was strongly nationalist, which suited Ghelderode, who also expressed support for Flemish nationalism. (Belgium is a country made up of two distinct peoples. The Flemish are generally found in the north, while the Walloons, a French-speaking people, are found in the south. There has long been tension between the groups, though the French language has long predominated.)

In 1925, Ghelderode became the principal playwright for the Flemish People's Theatre, which produced a number of his early plays. During the 1920s, he was also a member of the Renaissance de l'Occident, a literary group that published his plays either in their magazine or in separate booklets. Some plays written or published at this time were not produced until many years later. By the late 1920s, Ghelderode's plays were also being produced in Paris and Rome.

The year 1930 saw the production of Ghelderode's *The Public Life of Pantagléize*—a play centered around the violent attack on capitalist society. *Pantagléize* presents Ghelderode's essentially religious vision, which

sees the world, by its very nature, as hopelessly corrupt. During the initial production, the actor playing the lead character grew ill and died, suffering a delirium in his final days in which he argued with characters he had played in several of Ghelderode's productions. The bizarre hallucinations of the dying man inspired Ghelderode to write *The Actor Makes His Exit* (1935), in which an actor grows ill and dies because of the morbid plays he has been performing.

***Alleged Nazi Sympathy*** Because he was committed to nothing and acted as a free writer, anarchist-aristocrat Ghelderode welcomed the Nazi invasion of Belgium in 1940 and hoped the Nazis would appreciate his work. Nazi Germany had been growing as a power under Adolf Hitler since the mid-1930s and had strong territorial ambitions. European leaders tried a policy of appeasement to avoid war, but allowing Germany to take over parts of Czechoslovakia did not curb Hitler's desire for territory. World War II began when Great Britain and France declared war on Germany for invading Poland in 1939. By 1940, Germany had invaded and taken over Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. While a democratic Belgian government was formed in exile, Belgium remained occupied until 1944.

Anti-Semitic and hostile to democratic government, Ghelderode took the Nazis to be German comrades of the Flemish nationalists. During the occupation, he went on German radio to broadcast a series of talks on folklore subjects under the title *Our Own Things and People*. Charged with collaborating with the enemy at war's end, Ghelderode lost his job and citizenship. A series of judicial appeals finally won him a pardon and a revocation of the charges against him. In 1949, he was awarded a government pension and essentially retired from playwrighting.

***International Acclaim*** Ironically, Ghelderode first won international acclaim the year he retired. A Paris production of his play *Chronicles of Hell*, first written in 1929, caused such a scandal that the curtain was brought down on the show after four performances. The resulting publicity launched a series of other productions of his plays both previously produced and unproduced in Paris, Rome, Madrid, Copenhagen, Oslo, Krakow, Cairo, and various locations throughout Eastern Europe. By the late 1950s, Ghelderode's plays were also being produced in the United States. His plays were produced in his native Belgium throughout the decade as well. His last play was written in 1952, *Mary the Poor*, on commission from the Brabant church of Woluwe-Saint-Lambert. It is considered by most critics to be inferior to his earlier works. Despite this relative failure, he was probably the most influential playwright in French and among the most influential worldwide when he died on April 1, 1962.

### Works in Literary Context

Unlike many of his contemporaries in the theater, Ghelderode, who penned more than fifty plays, focused

almost exclusively on writing drama. His oeuvres include only a handful of published works that are not plays. He wrote plays that shocked audiences, challenged convention, and employed popular theatrical traditions that had been neglected by artists of the elite. Sex, death, religion, and the theater itself were Ghelderode's most cherished themes, and he addressed them while testing the limits of social mores and contemporary drama.

**Unique and Varied Influences** The carnival atmosphere of Ghelderode's plays is derived from traditional Flemish street carnivals, masquerades, and the peasant revelries found in the paintings of Pieter Brueghel. Ghelderode set several plays in what he termed "Brueghellande." Critics and commentators often compared his works to the art of Brueghel and Hieronymus Bosch as well as to the plays of Maurice Maeterlinck. Ghelderode also credited the Elizabethans and such Spanish playwrights as Lope de Vega and Pedro Calderón as sources of inspiration. Another powerful influence was the medieval world and its exuberant festivals, omnipresent church, brutality, and sensuality.

**Grotesque Style, Fantastic and Macabre Themes** An openness to the fantastic is often present in Ghelderode's plays. In *Caroline's Household*, for example, a group of mannequins used for target practice in a shooting gallery escape to seek revenge on those who have harmed them. In *The Blind Men*, inspired by a Brueghel painting, three blind pilgrims refuse to believe a one-eyed man who tells them they are headed in the wrong direction. They end up falling into quicksand. Other plays feature the devil, living corpses, masked revelers at carnival time, misers, lechers, angels, historical figures, and midgets. Ghelderode's plays present a grotesque, absurd world where humans live in torment and confusion. This "carnival of vices" is the result of a world that has lost its faith. Dark and foreboding, Ghelderode's plays blend elements from marionette plays, medieval festival, and religious mystery drama into a personal statement unlike any other in modern drama.

**Influence on Postwar Playwrights** Ghelderode redefined the possibilities of the theater and prepared the way for postwar playwrights such as Jean Genet and Samuel Beckett.

### Works in Critical Context

Critical study of Ghelderode's work has followed a pattern of neglect and rediscovery throughout the playwright's career, especially since his death in 1962. In Belgium, and somewhat later in France, early audiences and critics of Ghelderode's plays were often shocked by their uncompromising portrait of human depravity and sin, their treatment of religious hypocrisy, and their scatological wit. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, the Parisian theater establishment came to embrace him

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ghelderode's famous contemporaries include:

**Bertolt Brecht** (1898–1956): German playwright, director, and poet, he was influential as creator of "epic theater," operator of the acclaimed Berliner Ensemble theater company, and practitioner of experimental drama. His works include *The Threepenny Opera* (1928).

**M. C. Escher** (1898–1972): Dutch graphic artist, he is world-renowned for his woodcuts, lithographs, and mezzotints that trick the eye, seem to defy logic or physics, and feature explorations that include infinity and the impossible.

**Alfred Hitchcock** (1899–1980): British film and television director and producer, he is considered an icon for his pioneering suspense and thriller entertainment, his droll wit, and his unique style—including making cameo appearances in every one of his films and presenting his own series with props and mental gags. His films include *The 39 Steps* (1935).

**C. S. Lewis** (1898–1968): Irish writer and scholar, he is best known for his series *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1949–1954), but is also popular for his studies of Christian apologetics.

**Golda Meir** (1898–1978): The fourth prime minister of Israel, she was known as "The Iron Lady" of politics.

as an innovative and important writer. Though his stature briefly waned in France around his death, his stature as a playwright of international importance grew and spread to North and South America, Eastern Europe, and Great Britain. Since the 1960s, Ghelderode's reputation has continued to increase.

Critics over the decades have suggested that Ghelderode's plays do not fit into any established tradition. While Ghelderode's theater defies categorization, his most avid scholars have been able to articulate his artistic approach as it presents itself in his work.

**Importance of the Plays** "Among modern dramatists," George E. Wellwarth explained in *Tulane Drama Review*, "Michel de Ghelderode stands by himself. If we must have a classification for him, then he can most nearly be compared to that group of novelists who have concentrated on the creation of a fictional world of their own, a microcosm in which to reflect their view of human behavior in the world as a whole. . . . Ghelderode has created an enclosed world that reflects and comments upon the larger world outside. Ghelderode's world is medieval Flanders, and his view of the world can best be described as savagely grotesque."

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who also favored macabre themes:

*American Psycho* (1991), a novel by Bret Easton Ellis. The central character in this work of fiction has a disturbing way of dealing with irritating guests.

*Buried Alive* (2002), a nonfiction book by Jan Bondeson. In this thoroughly researched work, the author recounts the history of the fear of being the victim of premature burial.

"The Call of Cthulhu" (1926), a short story by H. P. Lovecraft. When his loved one dies, the narrator discovers a disturbing truth.

*The Shining* (1977), a novel by Stephen King. A winter caretaker and his family have otherworldly experiences in the Overlook Hotel.

"The surface characteristics of Ghelderode's universe are dazzling," Jacques and June Guicharnaud concluded in *Modern French Theatre*. "In many of his plays masqueraders, grotesque figures, living corpses, gluttonous and lustful men and women frantically move about in a decor of purple shadows, full of strong smells, and throw violent, foul, or mysterious phrases at each other in highly colored language filled with Belgian idioms, archaisms, and shrieks. Even in the plays where the language is closest to modern French, the dialogue and long speeches are profuse and frenetic. There is no rest in Ghelderode's theatre; the shock is permanent."

### Responses to Literature

1. Using your library or the Internet, find out more about one of the artistic movements listed below. Write a short paper summarizing your findings.

Angry Penguins  
Cubism  
Dogme 95  
Electronic Art Music  
Expressionism  
Noise Music  
No Wave  
Pop Art  
Progressive Rock  
Social Realism

2. Ghelderode was known for using imagery from Renaissance art in his plays. Some critics have even

compared his plays to Flemish paintings by Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Brueghel. Using your library or the Internet, find several copies of paintings by Bosch or Brueghel. Then, working with a single Ghelderode play, see if you can detect the influences of either Bosch or Brueghel. This can be in the imagery of the play—the use of color, shape, sensory experience, object, or scene—or it might be in the repeated appearance of one item as a symbol. How would you argue, then, that a Ghelderode play is like a Brueghel or Bosch painting? What imagery or symbolism do the two works share? Create a presentation for the class with your findings.

3. Some critics note that Ghelderode was influenced by the medieval Italian theatrical tradition known as *commedia dell'arte*. To find out more about this type of theater, read *Commedia dell'Arte: An Actor's Handbook* (1994), by John Rudlin.

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## Kahlil Gibran

BORN: 1883, Bechari, Lebanon

DIED: 1931, New York

NATIONALITY: Lebanese

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

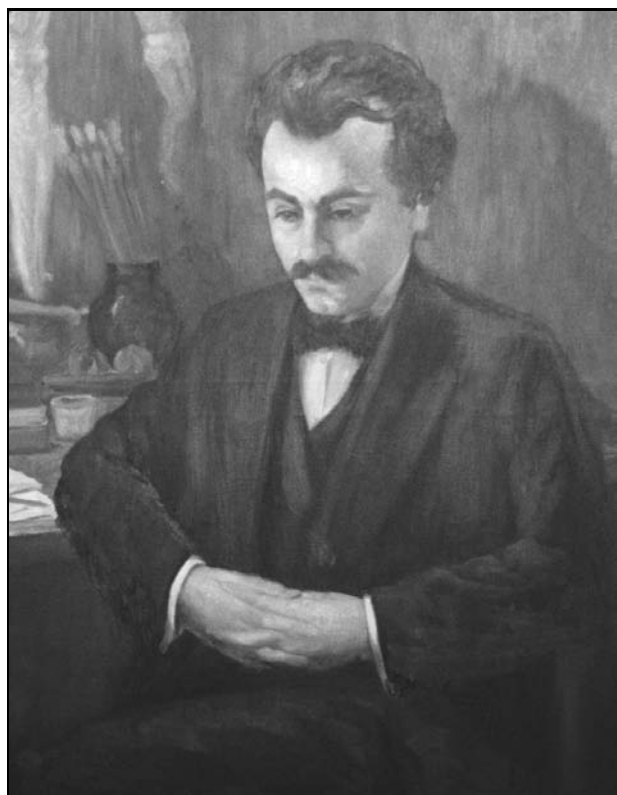
*A Tear and a Smile* (1914)

*The Madman* (1918)

*The Prophet* (1923)

### Overview

Lebanese author of the immensely popular *The Prophet*, Kahlil Gibran is one of the most commercially successful poets of the twentieth century. His small books, biblical in style and often illustrated with his own allegorical drawings, have been translated into twenty languages, making him the most widely known writer to emerge from the Arab-speaking world. Gibran's poetry and prose are recognized for their metrical beauty and emotionally evocative language. They also demonstrate an ecstatic spiritualism and a serene love of humanity.



Kahlil Gibran © Helene Rogers / Alamy

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

#### *From Lebanon to the United States and Back*

Kahlil Gibran, baptized Gibran Khalil Gibran, was born on January 6, 1883, in Bechari, Lebanon, to Khalil Gibran and Kamila Rahme. His childhood in the isolated village beneath Mt. Lebanon included few material comforts, and he had no formal early education. However, he received a strong spiritual heritage. From an early age he displayed a range of artistic skills, especially in the visual arts. He continued to draw and paint throughout his life, even illustrating many of his books. Gibran's family immigrated to the United States when he was twelve and settled in the Boston area, but he returned to the Middle East for schooling two years later. Pursuing his artistic talents further, he entered the famed École des Beaux Arts in Paris, where he studied under the French sculptor Auguste Rodin. Gibran's first efforts at writing were poems and short plays originally penned in Arabic that attracted modest success. In 1904, Gibran returned to the United States where he befriended Mary Haskell, headmistress of a Boston school. She became his adviser, and the two wrote lengthy romantic missives to each other for a number of years. These letters were later reproduced in the 1972 book *Beloved Prophet: The Love Letters of Kahlil Gibran and Mary Haskell, and Her Private Journal*.

**Exile and World War I** During these early adult years, Gibran lived in Boston's Chinatown. Scholars note that the works from this period show a preoccupation with his homeland and a sadness stemming from his status as an exile. One of his first published books, 'Ar' is *al-muruj* (later published in English as *Nymphs of the Valley*, 1910), was a collection of three stories set in Lebanon. Two subsequent works written during this era, later published as *Spirits Rebellious* and *The Broken Wings*, are, respectively, a collection of four stories and one novella. In each, a young man is the hero figure, rebelling against those inside Lebanon who are corrupting it; common literary targets include the Lebanese aristocracy and the Christian church.

During World War I, his growing success as an émigré writer was tempered by Lebanon's abysmal wartime situation. Lebanon was at the time a region of the Ottoman Empire, which had chosen to side with Germany and Austro-Hungary, the Central powers, in their war against England, France, Russia, and their allies. Ultimately, after the Central powers were defeated by Allied troops, the Ottoman Empire was occupied and broken up into smaller regions to be controlled by Allied countries; as part of the peace accord, France assumed control of Lebanon. Prior to that, however, during the harshest periods of the war, many Lebanese citizens starved to death. Scholars of the poet's body of work hypothesize that Gibran's sorrow manifested itself in a

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gibran's famous contemporaries include:

**Mohandas Gandhi** (1869–1948): This Indian social leader advocated nonviolent resistance as a means to effect social change.

**Franklin Delano Roosevelt** (1882–1945): The thirty-second president of the United States served four terms in office. His New Deal policies are widely credited with helping the United States survive the Great Depression.

**T. S. Eliot** (1888–1965): American-born expatriate poet and playwright. His best-known poem, *The Waste Land*, was published the year before Gibran's *The Prophet*.

**Theodore Roosevelt** (1858–1919): Nicknamed Teddy, he was the twenty-sixth president of the United States, serving in office from 1901 to 1909.

**William Butler Yeats** (1865–1939): This Irish poet was honored with the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923, the year of the publication of Gibran's *The Prophet*.

more pronounced quest for self-fulfillment in his works, and a spirituality that sought wisdom and truth without the aid of an organized religion. At one point in his career, the writer was excommunicated from the Christian Maronite church. His first work written and published in English was 1918's *The Madman: His Parables and Poems*. Its title comes from a previously published prose work in which the hero sees existence as "a tower whose bottom is the earth and whose top is the world of the infinite . . . to clamour for the infinite in one's life is to be considered an outcast and a fool by the rest of men clinging to the bottom of the tower," explained Mikhail Naimy in the *Journal of Arabic Literature*.

Out of the sadness and despair of the years leading up to, including, and following World War I came Gibran's best-known work, *The Prophet*, which was published in 1923. The author planned it to be first in a trilogy, followed by *The Garden of the Prophet* and *The Death of the Prophet*. The initial book *The Prophet* chronicles, through the title character Almustafa's own sermons, his life and teachings. Much of it is given in orations to the Orphalese, the people among whom Almustafa has been placed.

**Death** Gibran was forty-eight when he died of liver cancer in New York City on April 10, 1931. The Arabic world eulogized him as a genius and patriot. A grand procession greeted his body upon its return to Bechari for burial in September 1931.

### Works in Literary Context

Diverse influences, including Boston's literary world, the English Romantic poets, mystic William Blake, and phi-

losopher Friedrich Nietzsche, combined with his Bechari experience, shaped Gibran's artistic and literary career. The influence of English poet William Blake, who illustrated his own collections of poetry, can be seen in Gibran's own illustrations. However, the most fruitful analysis of Gibran's predecessors must include a look at the parallels between Gibran's magnum opus and nineteenth-century authors Nietzsche and Walt Whitman.

**Literary Comparisons** Gibran's biographer, Mikhail Naimy, found similarities between *The Prophet* and Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. In each, the author speaks through a created diviner and both prophets walk among humankind as outsiders. Some elements are autobiographical. The critic saw a parallel in Gibran's dozen-year stay in New York City with the twelve-year wait Almustafa endured before returning home from the land of the Orphalese.

Another critic compared *The Prophet* to Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*. Mysticism, asserted Suhail ibn-Salim Hanna in *Literature East and West*, is a theme common to both, with Gibran having rejected the attitudes termed Nietzschean in favor of the more benign European ideology that unfolded during the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. "Like Whitman, Gibran came to see, even accept, the reality of a benevolent and harmonious universe," wrote Hanna.

**Gibran's Legacy** Authors since Gibran have utilized the spiritual/mystical autobiographical form to great effect. Respected psychiatrist Carl Jung took the form, tweaked it, and produced his memoir *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Nonetheless, Gibran's legacy extends beyond his direct influence on his literary successors and is best seen in the way he is viewed as an inspirational figure, whose mere mention evokes mysticism and thoughtfulness.

### Works in Critical Context

Overall, Gibran's work has received little academic examination. As an introductory essay in *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism* points out, "Generally, most critics agree that Gibran had the refined sensibility of a true poet and a gift for language, but that he often marred his work by relying on shallow epigrams and trite parables."

**A Tear and a Smile** Gibran's first collection of poetry appeared in Arabic in 1914 and was translated into English several years later and published as *A Tear and a Smile*. "The tears, which are much more abundant here than the smiles," observed N. Naimy in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, "are those of Gibran the misfit rather than of the rebel in Boston, singing in an exceedingly touching way of his frustrated love and estrangement, his loneliness, homesickness and melancholy." Naimy called this book a bridge between a first and second stage of Gibran's career: the writer's longing for Lebanon gradually evolved into a dissatisfaction with the destructive



attitude of humankind in general. By now Gibran's body of work was received enthusiastically in the extensive Arabic-speaking world, winning a readership that stretched from Asia to the Middle East to Europe, as well as across the Atlantic. Soon his writings were being referred to as "Gibranism," a concept that "Gibran's English readers will have no difficulty in divining," wrote Claude Bragdon in his book *Merely Players*, aspects of "Gibranism" include "Mystical vision, metrical beauty, a simple and fresh approach to the so-called problems of life." Today, Arabic scholars praise Gibran for introducing Western romanticism and a freer style to highly formalized Arabic poetry.

**The Prophet** In October 1923 *The Prophet* was published; it sold over one thousand copies in three months. *The Prophet* was a popular success, but its critical reception has always been mixed. "In this book, more than in any other of his books, Gibran's style reaches its very zenith," declared Gibran's biographer, Mikhail Naimy. "Many metaphors are so deftly formed that they stand out like statues chiseled in the rock." Nonetheless, not all critics were as kind to Gibran's magnum opus as Naimy. Critiquing *The Prophet* from a more practical standpoint, Gibran's biographer, Khalil S. Hawi, faulted its structure. Writing in *Kahlil Gibran: His Background, Character and Works*, Hawi noted that "behind the attempts to perfect the sermons and each epigrammatical sentence in them lies an artistic carelessness which allowed him to leave the Prophet standing on his feet from morning to evening delivering sermon after sermon, without pausing to consider that the old man might get tired, or that his audience might not be able to concentrate on his sermons for so long." Still, *The Prophet* went on to become the best-selling title in the history of its publisher, Alfred A. Knopf.

## Responses to Literature

1. Using the Internet and the library, research the word *mystic*. Based on your research, would you consider Kahlil Gibran a mystic? Why or why not? Explain your thinking in a short essay.
2. For a long time, mystics were popular religious leaders. In some ways, some very important historical figures could be considered mystics: Jesus Christ, Confucius, Buddha, and even Socrates. How do you think mystics would be received today?
3. Read *The Prophet*, keeping in mind Khalil Hawi's criticism of the practicality of the Prophet's delivering sermon after sermon without pausing. Do you think that Hawi's criticism is justified? If so, do you think the criticism lessens the overall effect of the text? Explain your thought processes in a short essay.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Gibran's early work demonstrates his feeling of exile from his native Lebanon, suffusing it with great sadness and inspiring brilliance. Here are a few of the works of exiled writers:

*Tristia* (c. 10 CE), a work of poetry by Ovid. Ovid was exiled by the Roman emperor Augustus for reasons that remain mysterious. In this work, he laments his exiled state.

*Dubliners* (1914), a book of short stories by James Joyce. This collection of short stories depicts the people and places of Dublin. The book was well received by the Irish, many of whom felt that Joyce had captured the essence of the Irish character, both good and bad. The collection was published ten years after Joyce subjected himself to a self-imposed exile from his native Ireland.

*The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1982), a novel by Milan Kundera. Czech author Kundera lived in exile in Paris while his homeland was dominated by the Soviet Union, and wrote this novel about the Prague Spring, a period of political liberalization that led to a Soviet military crackdown in 1968.

4. In what ways, if at all, is the teaching of the Prophet in *The Prophet* relevant to your life? Cite specific examples from the text as you fashion your response.
5. To find out more about the history of Lebanon, read *A House of Many Mansions: A History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (1993), by Kamal Salibi. Salibi has been praised for his even-handed approach to Lebanon's recent history, which is marked by sectarian violence.

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## ■ André Gide

BORN: 1869, Paris, France

DIED: 1951, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Marshlands* (1895)

*The Immoralist* (1902)

*The Counterfeiters* (1927)

*Théséus* (1946)

### Overview

André Gide, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1947, saw a writing career that spanned over six decades and ranged in style from symbolist to classical to biography to political tract. His work often focused on a central character, usually a thinly veiled version of Gide himself, who struggled with reconciling two vastly different sets of morals. Today he is chiefly remembered for his extensive journals and his frank discussion of his own bisexuality at a time when such subject matter was strictly taboo.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**A Divided Nature** André Gide was born in Paris on November 22, 1869, to Paul Gide, a professor of law at the Sorbonne, and his wife, Juliette. They were both of the Protestant upper middle class. After the death of his father when André was eleven, the boy grew up in a largely feminine environment. In later years Gide often attributed his divided nature to this mixed southern Protestant and northern Norman Catholic heritage. His fragile health and nervous temperament affected his education, which included both formal schooling and a combination of travel and private tutoring. At the age of fifteen he vowed a lifelong spiritual love to his cousin, Madeleine Rondeaux.

**Symbolist Period** In 1891 Gide published his first book, *The Notebooks of André Walter*. In it, dream is preferred to reality, spiritual love to physical. It did not succeed in winning Madeleine over, as Gide had intended. During this period he was introduced into the symbolist salons—intellectual gatherings of followers of the symbolist movement—of Stéphane Mallarmé and José de Heredia by his friend Pierre Louÿs. The influence of the salons and symbolist thought can be seen in Gide's next works, *Treatise of the Narcissus* (1891) and *Le Voyage d'Urien* (1893).

In 1893 Gide set out for North Africa with his friend Paul Laurens hoping to harmonize his sensual desires with his inherited puritanical inhibitions. Gide fell ill with tuberculosis there and was forced to return to France, where he was shocked to find the symbolist salons



André Gide Hulton Archive / Getty Images

unchanged. He retired to Neuchâtel for the winter and wrote *Marshlands*, a satire on stagnation that broke with symbolism.

**Unconventional Lifestyle** After returning to France, Gide married his cousin Madeleine. Gide described their attachment as “the devotion of my whole life,” but the marriage was traumatic for them both. Gide expressed an overwhelming spiritual need to share his life with his cousin, and she provided him with a source of stability, but her strict Christian values often conflicted with his unconventional lifestyle. He specifically separated love and sexual pleasure.

In 1895 Gide returned to North Africa, where he met Oscar Wilde and Lord Douglas. Wilde encouraged Gide to acknowledge his love of young men, and Gide passionately gave in. This was a pivotal year for Gide as it also brought the death of his mother and his marriage to Madeleine, who continued to symbolize for him the pull of virtue, restraint, and spirituality against his cult of freedom and physical pleasure. Gide's life was a constant battle to strike a balance between these opposing imperatives.

**Middle Years** Gide wrote his doctrine of freedom in 1897. *Fruits of the Earth* is a lyrical work advocating liberation through sensuous hedonism. Five years later, Gide published *The Immoralist* (1902), a novel consisting of many autobiographical elements. In it, the author

dramatizes the dangers of his male protagonist's selfish quest for freedom and pleasure at the cost of death to his pious wife. In this, perhaps Gide's greatest novel, as in many of his other works, the portrait of the virtuous, devoted heroine was inspired by Madeleine.

Conceived at the same time as *The Immoralist*, *Strait Is the Gate* (1909) is a critique of the opposite tendency toward excessive restraint and useless mysticism. Also patterned after Madeleine, the heroine renounces her earthly love to devote herself entirely to God and the spiritual life. The final pages of her diary suggest the futility of her self-denial as she is left in solitude without God. The book was Gide's first success.

In the years between these two novels, Gide cofounded *La Nouvelle revue française*. After publishing another highly polished though less autobiographical work in 1911, Gide was ready to challenge the principle of order in art. He accomplished this with *The Vatican Swindle* (1914), a humorous satire on middle-class complacency, relativism, and chance. The work evolved the notion of the "gratuitous act," an expression of absolute freedom, unpremeditated, seemingly unmotivated. It is clear he was influenced by his reading of Henri Bergson, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

**Religious Crisis and Homosexuality** In *The Pastoral Symphony* (1919), a pastor's interpretation of Christ's words to legitimize his love for the heroine is pitted against his son's orthodox adherence to the restrictions of St. Paul. This work is a reflection of Gide's religious crises of 1905–1906, which had been precipitated by his disturbing meetings with the fervent Catholic poet, playwright, and diplomat Paul Claudel. This religious crisis also inspired *Numquid et tu...?*, which retraces Gide's effort to seek and find his own truth in the Gospels.

In 1924 Gide risked his reputation by publishing *Corydon*, a defense of homosexuality, and, two years later, *If It Die...*, his well-known autobiography that focuses on the years 1869–1895, the period of his homosexual liberation.

**The Counterfeiters** Gide's *The Counterfeiters* appeared in 1926. The culmination of thirty years of meditating on two aspects of literary freedom—freedom from subjective, autobiographical fiction and freedom from the limitations of the traditional novel—the novel conveys a true impression of life perceived subjectively and individually. In it, Gide devised a technique of disorder. *The Counterfeiters* marked a general revolt against realism by defying the reader's conventional expectations. Instead, the reader is forced to reflect on the technical problems facing the modern novelist.

**Later Years** In 1925–1926 Gide traveled in the Congo with Marc Allégret. Gide was deeply distressed by the colonial exploitation of the natives that he witnessed there. When he returned to France he published

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gide's famous contemporaries include:

**Friedrich Nietzsche** (1844–1900): German philosopher who critiqued contemporary views of religion, morality, science, and culture. He achieved his greatest notoriety after he had already begun a descent into syphilis-induced madness.

**Henri Bergson** (1859–1941): French philosopher of metaphysics, his works touched on freewill, memory, and evolution. His thinking had a profound influence on modernist writers.

**Philippe Pétain** (1856–1951): Pétain made a name for himself as a victorious general in World War I only to earn the undying resentment of his countrymen after he assumed leadership of Vichy France, the puppet state set up by the victorious Germans in 1940.

**Virginia Woolf** (1882–1941): A major figure in English literature and the post-World War I London literary scene, Woolf, whose bisexuality influenced her writing, is considered one of the foremost modernist authors.

**Oscar Wilde** (1854–1900): Novelist, playwright, poet, irrepressible wit, and professional celebrity, Oscar Wilde was one of the most celebrated figures of his time. His homosexuality led to a conviction for "gross indecency" and led to his early death.

accounts of his trip and issued a call for action. This experience facilitated his conversion to communism in the 1930s. However, disillusioned by a visit to the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) in 1936, he admitted his mistake in *Return from the U.S.S.R.* (1936) and *Afterthoughts on the U.S.S.R.* (1937). Former associates bitterly criticized Gide for these books.

Gide no longer felt at ease with intellectual conformity. In 1931 he insisted in the play *Oedipus* on the individual's obligation to draw his own ethical conclusions rather than follow the path of blind discipleship.

In 1935 *Later Fruits of the Earth* reiterated the ideal of liberation tempered by consideration of others, a sense of social duty, and self-discipline. During the German occupation of France during World War II, Gide was forced to flee to Tunisia. In *Theseus* (1946) the adventures and accomplishments of the original *Theseus* parallel Gide's own. The following year Gide was awarded an honorary degree from Oxford and the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Widely considered the most important publication of Gide's later years was his *Journal, 1889–1939*, released in 1939. The final volume (1950) carries the journal through 1949. Considered by some his best work, the *Journal* is the moving self-portrait of a man whose mind

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Gide stirred considerable controversy for featuring gay or bisexual characters in his fiction. Other works that broke ground in their portrayals of gay characters include:

*The Miracle of the Rose*, an autobiographical work by Jean Genet. Published in 1946, Genet's autobiographical, nonlinear work describes the homosexual erotic desire he feels for his fellow adolescent detainees in the Mettray Penal Colony and Fontevault prison.

*The Diary of Anaïs Nin: Vol. 1 (1931–1934)*, a memoir by Anaïs Nin. Published in 1966, Nin's diary explores, among other topics, the author's experiments with bisexuality. The published version made Nin a feminist icon of the 1960s.

*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, a memoir by Gertrude Stein. Written in 1933, this is actually Stein's autobiography, written from the perspective of her partner Toklas. This work, despite its homosexual subject matter, brought Stein worldwide fame and recognition.

*Prick Up Your Ears: The Biography of Joe Orton*, a biography by John Lahr. Published in 1978, the biography reconstructs the life and death of British comic playwright Joe Orton, who was widely considered a successor to Oscar Wilde and Noel Coward. Orton was murdered by his homosexual lover at the age of thirty-four.

mirrors the crisis of the modern intellectual. It contains precious information on his platonic marriage to Madeleine, who quietly endured her husband's homosexual adventures by taking refuge in a world of piety and domesticity. Her mute suffering was a tremendous source of guilt and pain to Gide, who loved her deeply. *Et nunc manet in te*, published posthumously in 1951, is Gide's testimony to that love and an honest account of their unspoken tragedy. Gide died in Paris on February 19, 1951, and was buried at Cuverville in Normandy.

### Works in Literary Context

**Symbolist and Classical Influences** Throughout his literary career Gide adapted his style to suit his subject matter, resulting in an unusually wide variety of works. Such early efforts as *The Notebooks of André Walter* and *The Fruits of the Earth* are rich in metaphor and lyric beauty, as befits works featuring an impressionable young man's first encounters with life. The poetic prose contained in these books reveals Stéphane Mallarmé and the symbolists's influence on the author. Gide abandoned symbolism, however, in favor of a simpler, more classical

style when he began experimenting with themes and forms drawn from the Bible and Greek mythology. Gide also discovered the works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and was influenced by his classicism. All of these factors played an important part in the development of Gide's mature style. For example, he made use of ancient myth in such works as *Prometheus Misbound* (1899), and *Theseus*, his celebrated study of the problems of the mature artist. His drama, meanwhile, especially *Saul* (1903) and *Numquid et tu ...?* (1926), is based on biblical materials. Critics have also noted logical and formal similarities between Gide's recits, or psychological narratives, such as *Strait Is the Gate* and *The Pastoral Symphony*, and biblical parables. Some believe that his farces, including *Marshlands* and *Lafcadio's Adventures* (1914), are derived from the same source.

**The Counterfeiters** Gide's most ambitious and stylistically elaborate achievement was the novel *The Counterfeiters* (1917), a work that owes a great deal to Fyodor Dostoyevsky. An experimental novel, *The Counterfeiters* takes its form from patterns in music. In it, Gide attempts to reproduce the unstructured chaos of everyday life through the use of meaningless episodes, conversations, and Dostoyevskian interruptions of action at moments of great intensity. Linear narrative is abandoned as several unrelated stories occur simultaneously. Although Gide's innovations in *The Counterfeiters* were important to the development of the French novel, he did not continue to pursue the experiment. Later works, such as *Oedipus* and *Theseus*, are written in a severely classical style that abandons the inventive audacity of Gide's earlier works.

**Autobiography** The characters in Gide's fiction, even though they are based in part on himself, often distort the image of the artist as they disclose it. This is because Gide's fictional technique was to create a character abstracted from a single aspect of his personality. Thus the nature of his characters often varies widely from work to work. Gide was also constantly reexamining his assumptions, so it is not uncommon for successive novels to portray contradictory beliefs and situations. Still, Gide's shifting concerns do not reflect indecisiveness, as early critics charged. Rather, they exhibit external evidence of his continual dialogue with himself.

**Influence** Although he was well known and respected among his fellow writers, Gide remained unrecognized by the general public until the 1920s, when his involvement as founder and editor of the prestigious *La nouvelle revue française* led to his discovery. His influence on the Albert Camus, Jean Genet, and their generation was significant. Although he rejected existentialism, he is widely recognized as a forerunner of the existentialist movement.

### Works in Critical Context

Credited with introducing modern experimental techniques to the French novel, Gide is highly esteemed for the

autobiographical honesty of his work, which depicts the moral development of a modern intellectual. His work is recognized for its diversity in both form and content, yet critics have also noted that his characters consistently reflect his own moral and philosophical conflicts. For this reason, commentators on Gide's works often attach as much significance to biographical detail as they do to artistic method.

One of Gide's primary artistic and philosophical concerns was authenticity. He discussed his life in a way that has been called exhibitionistic by some critics, while others discern religious overtones in his "unremitting search for self-correction and self-purification." Alfred Kazin, in discussing the psychology of Gide's highly confessional works, observed that "he would like to be both free and good, and failing both, had compromised by being honest." The much-discussed Gidean notions of "sincerity"—which Germaine Bree has summarized as signifying the "struggle of human beings with truths compulsively followed"—and "*disponibilité*," which Gide interpreted as "following one's inclinations, so long as they lead upward," were products of this lifelong passion for self-awareness. However, Gide's critics are quick to point out that although he used forms conducive to autobiographical honesty, such as first person novels, journals, and personal essays, Gide did not reveal himself completely in his works.

Critics today are divided in their assessment of Gide's novels. While some perceive them as dated and of only minor interest to contemporary readers, others maintain that the perfection of Gide's style and the sincerity with which he set out to expose social, religious, artistic, and sexual hypocrisy guarantee the novels a permanent place in twentieth-century literature. There is wider consensus among critics about the value of Gide's voluminous *Journals*, though. Despite the charges of narcissism that are often raised in discussions of the *Journals*, most critics agree with Philip Toynbee that Gide's "greatest talent was for portraying himself against the carefully delineated background of his time," and that the *Journals* today retain "all the interest for us which can be earned by a patient sincerity, an eager curiosity, and a brilliant pen."

## Responses to Literature

1. Societal attitudes toward and treatment of homosexuals has changed in the century since Gide began writing on the subject. Write an essay describing the societal attitudes and legal status of homosexuals in your own society. What is your own opinion of the status of homosexuals in today's society?
2. Gide's frank treatment of his homosexuality in his work made him a literary outcast for much of his life. How did other contemporary homosexual authors such as Thomas Mann, Oscar Wilde, and Christopher Isherwood express their sexuality in their work, and what consequences did they suffer?
3. André Gide and Marcel Proust were both French authors whose works touched on the nature of reality and illusion. Compare and contrast Gide's *The Counterfeiters* and Proust's *Swann's Love*. How does Proust's treatment of women and love compare to Gide's?
4. Several of Gide's works have heavy classical overtones, recalling ancient Greek dramas. What are the characteristics of a classical story? How closely did such works as *Oedipus* and *Theseus* subscribe to the classical Greek template? Were there any modern stylistic elements present in these stories?

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## ■ Jean Giono

BORN: 1895, Manosque, Basses-Alpes (now Alpes-de-Haute Provence), France

DIED: 1970, Manosque, Alpes-de-Haute Provence, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

*Hill of Destiny* (1929)

*Blue Boy* (1946)

"The Man Who Planted Trees" (1953)

*The Horseman on the Roof* (1954)

*The Straw Man* (1957)

### Overview

French author Jean Giono is best known as a novelist and playwright who rejected the modern, industrialized world and advocated a return to a simple existence in harmony with nature. His characters are often peasants who love the earth and artisans who find their satisfaction in work well done. He is remembered today as one of the most original and visionary writers of postwar France.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Provençal Childhood** Antoine Jean Giono was born on March 30, 1895, to an anarchist shoemaker and his wife in the small town of Manosque in Provence, France. While at school in Manosque, Giono read the Greek and Latin classics—they were cheaper to buy than books by modern authors—and began writing at an early age. The harsh, sunlit landscapes of his native Provence fed his fantasy that ancient Greece had magically been overlaid on southern France.

**Served in World War I** At the end of 1914, Giono was drafted into service in the French army in World War I. After the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, in Serbia by a Bosnian terrorist, what could have been a local skirmish turned into an all-encompassing conflict because of entangling diplomatic alliances. France was allied with Great Britain, Russia, and later the United States against Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey.

From 1916 to 1918, Giono participated in the war as an infantry soldier in trench warfare. The Western Front of the war was primarily fought in this grueling type of warfare, with trench lines zigzagging across France. During the battle in Flanders in 1918, he was gassed. World War I was the first conflict to use poison gas as a weapon. Gases used in combat included chlorine, phosgene, and mustard gas. The war ended in 1918 with a victory by the



Jean Giono Giono, Jean, Paris, photograph. AP Images.

French, British, and Americans, and the Treaty of Versailles was ratified in 1919.

**Published First Poems** After demobilization in 1919, he began working in various banks until 1929, when he decided to try to make his living by writing. Giono pursued his writing throughout the early 1920s and published his first work, a series of prose poems, in 1924 under the title *Accompanied by the Flute*. Giono's literary career began to blossom as he won a long series of literary prizes. He practiced many genres with steady success, including novels, poetry, drama, literary criticism, historical narrative, and some unclassifiable hybrids of his own creation. He expanded his interests to include painting, music, and filmmaking, making many friends with influential artists and critics in all genres across France.

**War-Influenced Novels** By the 1930s, Giono was publishing important novels such as *To the Slaughterhouse* (1931). It is the first of Giono's works in which the modern age, in the form of World War I, bursts into his private world of the peaceful countryside. There is one section of horrible beauty, describing how rats and crows feast on dead soldiers. In Giono's hands, the forces of life and bitterness take contrary and alternating forms. This bitter evocation of war is replaced by affectionate memories of childhood and family in the semiautobiographical *Blue Boy* (1932).

Although still considered works anchored in a specific region, the novels *Song of the World* (1934), *Joy of Man's Desiring* (1935), and *Battles on the Mountain* (1937) represent a move away from the realistic presentation of the countryside toward a symbolic expression of the issues that were currently preoccupying the author. It was only a small step from these three novels to the more political writings of the late 1930s and early 1940s. With war imminent, Giono argues in *Refusal to Obey* (1937) and *Letter to the Peasants on Poverty and Peace* (1938) that if the peasants were to stop providing the towns and battle zones with food, then war would grind to a halt. In *True Riches, The Weight of the Sky*, and *Triumph of Life*, he sees contemporary society threatened by increasing mechanization and urban life, and urges a return to the natural order of the world together with a renunciation of materialistic values.

**Move to the Left** Giono's writings have been profoundly influenced by his political beliefs. His controversial position throughout the period of just prior to and including World War II was resolutely in favor of peace. Giono founded a movement in 1935 to promote pacifism, collective living, and ecological concerns. He also made speeches, circulated petitions, and contributed to leftist journals.

During the highly politicized period of the 1930s, Giono moved away from the left when the official Communist line began emphasizing national defense rather than pacifism. Not that Giono's antiwar feelings were always pacifist. Giono's politics were not so much driven by partisan beliefs as a dream of a peasant's paradise that would combine destruction of the machine-mad modern world with the rejuvenation of older societies.

**Imprisoned during World War II** Giono did consent to military service briefly when war broke out in September 1939, primarily because he did not want to bring trouble to his friends running the local authorities. World War II began in earnest at that time when Nazi Germany acted on its intense territorial ambitions by invading Poland. Abandoning their hitherto policy of appeasement, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. Germany soon invaded and conquered many continental European countries in 1940. France became occupied by Germany that June, and remained under Nazi control until 1944. There was a French government in exile, however, as well as an active organized French resistance to the Germans.

After Giono refused to cooperate further with local authorities, he was imprisoned for two months, then freed partly on the intervention of his many admirers. Near the end of the war, he was again imprisoned, this time for five months. He was accused of being a collaborator with the Germans, although he had not actively cooperated. Although some people turned away from him because of his refusal to participate in the French war effort, he was immensely popular as a writer after the war.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Giono's famous contemporaries include:

**Sinclair Lewis** (1885–1951): This novelist and satirist was the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. His novels include *Main Street* (1920), *Babbitt* (1922), and *Arrowsmith* (1925).

**Pierre Jean Jouve** (1887–1976): French poet, novelist, and critic. Religion and sexuality merge powerfully in his works. His books include *Dance of the Dead* (1917).

**Paul Valéry** (1871–1945): This French poet and critic believed that the creative mind always worked in similar ways, no matter if the subject was science or poetry. His poetry collections include *Charmed* (1922).

**Samuel Beckett** (1906–1989): This Irish dramatist, novelist, and poet was remarkably consistent in his darkly comic portrayals of human futility. He helped to define two different literary movements—modernism and postmodernism—through such plays as *Waiting for Godot* (1952).

**Paul Hindemith** (1895–1963): German composer and violinist. In an era of experimental classical music that emphasized atonality, Hindemith's music was harmonically advanced but always melodic.

**Grigory Yevseyevich Zinoviev** (1883–1936): This Russian Communist leader shared power with Joseph Stalin and Lev Kamenev after the death of Vladimir Lenin. During Stalin's move for absolute power, Zinoviev and Kamenev were removed from power, and Stalin had Zinoviev executed.

## Historical Themes

Giono continued to write prolifically after the war, despite being ostracized by some of his former followers. His post-World War II works are marked by a shift away from the poetic celebration of peasant life, however, to a series of novels with a historical background. The best known of these later novels is *The Horseman on the Roof* (1951), which received much public acclaim. His plays also often took on historical subject matter, including the radio play *Domitien* (1964) about the last days of the Roman emperor. His later output also included travel books and screenplays for such films as *Crésus*. Giono died of a heart attack on October 9, 1970, in Manosque.

## Works in Literary Context

Giono's influences are extensive and come from many different directions. First and foremost, his works are grounded in his experience with the people and textures of rural communities and the rugged French countryside. Giono was also very well read, and he drew heavily from

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Giono's "The Man Who Planted Trees," presents an idealized version of a simple man finding happiness by living a simple life in harmony with nature. Despite their poverty, peasants and rural folks are often idealized by writers. Their closeness to nature and their detachments from the corruptions of consumerist urban life often make them heroic, not pitiable, characters. Here are some other works that feature peasants as idealized characters or that exhort readers to adopt a peasantlike lifestyle:

*Émile; or, On Education* (1762), a philosophical treatise by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau details here what he considers the perfect education and upbringing for a "natural man" who can live untainted by the corruption of modern society.

*Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems* (1798), a poetry collection by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This collection marked the beginning of the Romantic period in English literature. The poems in the collection frequently focus on rustic settings and plain folk.

*Walden* (1854), a nonfiction work by Henry David Thoreau. Perhaps the most famous nonfiction work in American literature, this book details Thoreau's experiment in self-reliance living near a pond in Walden, Massachusetts.

*Quotations from Chairman Mao* (1964), nonfiction by Mao Tse-tung. This collection of excerpts from the famous Chinese leader, praising the virtues of peasant life as the guiding principles of the Communist Party, has had almost one billion copies in print.

classical literature, often superimposing Greek and Roman themes and literary structures on the contemporary French setting. He believed that nature is in a constant state of change—as is history, so in this way, nature and man are always bound together. A related theme is the danger of the increasing materialism and impersonality of modern life.

**Man's Unity with Nature** Giono was writing during a period of modernism (a literary movement that represented a self-conscious break with traditional forms and subject matter while searching for a distinctly contemporary mode of expression) when writers usually found bleakness and despair in their reaction to the increasing alienation and violence of life marked by two world wars. Whereas writers such as T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Ezra Pound found modern consciousness to be fragmented in an uncaring urban environment, Giono looked in a different direction and tended to find certainty and resolution in man's unity with nature. He rejected entirely the two things that modernists used to border their worldview: urban life and warfare.

**Pacifism** Giono's pacifism during World War II got him arrested twice, but this was to become one of his lasting influences on later writers who would write similarly about World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Iraq war. In novels such as *To the Slaughterhouse*, Giono shifted between scenes of village life and warfare, mixing the modes of narrative the way Kurt Vonnegut Jr. would later do in his antiwar novel *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969). Giono finds a kind of natural beauty in human and animal carnage, describing it in sensual detail—the effect is disturbing, as seen in the work of other lyrically graphic war writers such as the poet Wilfred Owen and the novelist Dalton Trumbo (*Johnny Got His Gun*, 1939).

### Works in Critical Context

Giono's reputation has, if anything, increased in the years since his death. He was recognized initially as a great poet in prose and a regional novelist, but his main appeal today lies in his handling of such themes as the struggle for survival against elemental forces, the strength of love and hatred, the destructive power of jealousy, and the creative power of friendship.

**The Novels** Literary scholars often praise Giono's sense of wonder and delight in the unity of man and nature. According to Henri Peyre, Giono "rejected much of our urban and analytical civilization; but he held out hope for despairing moderns. He aimed at rebuilding a new unity in man and endeavored to instill in him the sweet, or bitter, 'love that nature brings.'" Norma L. Goodrich expresses a similar view in *Giono: Master of Fictional Modes*. She found that Giono's novels "afford shelter and comfort by reminding the modern reader, with whom the world is much too much, that beyond his routine and narrow horizons lies a vast, adventure-some universe of freedom and pure delight."

Giono is considered one of the most important French novelists of the century. "Giono [was] first of all a great poet in prose," according to critic Maxwell Smith. "It is now generally recognized that he . . . brought . . . a new freshness, warmth, and color to the French language." In writing of Giono's earlier novels, Peyre asserts: "They [ignore] academic subtleties and the fashion of the day. Their heroes [are] not poisoned by complexities. . . . In them the tone of a psychological dissector [has] given way to that of a poetical master of suggestive language and an epic storyteller." And, finally, in discussing the profusion of Giono's work, Smith comments: "What will remain will in all likelihood be only a handful of his novels—but enough to assure him a permanent and distinguished rank among the great novelists of France."

### Responses to Literature

1. Research Giono's career as a writer and film director. Are his films much like his novels in their structure and content, or does Giono make alterations to his art when he uses this different form? What has the critical response been to his films, compared to his

novels? (Note: You can also answer these questions using Giono's art and music as topics.) Write a paper outlining your findings.

2. Giono liked to combine genres and invent new hybrid forms. He sometimes mixes prose and poetry, fiction and nonfiction. What are the pros and cons of this technique? Does Giono's way of writing fit in with the content of what he's saying? Create a presentation in which you outline your theories.
3. Giono was a pacifist, but good storytelling depends upon a vivid sense of conflict. In a paper, explain the ways Giono portrays conflict in his films and novels.
4. Perhaps the best-loved work by Giono is "The Man Who Planted Trees," a short story about the noble deeds of a simple peasant in harmony with the land. Giono gave up his rights to the story so it could be reprinted widely. In 1987, an animated version won the Academy Award, and it is often cited as one of the best animated shorts ever made. Do some research into the history of this remarkable story and its many adaptations, accounting for its extraordinary popularity and mythic appeal. Create a presentation of your findings.

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## Jean Giraudoux

BORN: 1882, Bellac, France

DIED: 1944, Paris

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*My Friend from Limousin* (1922)

*Amphitryon 38* (1929)

*Racine* (1930)

*Judith* (1931)

*Tiger at the Gates* (1935)



Jean Giraudoux Lipnitzki / Roger Viollet / Getty Images

## Overview

Although he first distinguished himself in fiction, Jean Giraudoux gained fame primarily because of the stylized dramas he wrote, focusing on the universal themes of love, death, and war. Engaged in elegant, intellectual dialogue, his characters frequently represent abstract ideas. Because of his seemingly effortless, witty manipulation of language, Giraudoux gained a reputation early in his career as an overly refined pseudo-intellectual. But behind that lyrical, playful use of words, Giraudoux's plays and novels—especially those of his later years—reveal a deep-seated idealism, a desire for an incorruptible world.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

*A Brilliant Youth, and the Urge to Travel* Hippolyte Jean Giraudoux was born in 1882 in Bellac, France, a province of Limousin, to Léger and Anne Giraudoux. Because his father, a minor civil servant, was a quiet man often absent from home, Giraudoux felt closer to his mother and his only sibling, an older brother. A gifted and brilliant child, he attended a boarding school in Chateauroux on scholarship, studying French literature, Greek, Latin, and philosophy, which emphasized the idealism of many nineteenth-century thinkers. After completing his studies in 1900, winning the school's award for excellence, Giraudoux moved to the Lakanal

school near Paris for two years of further preuniversity instruction. When he left the school, he received the Lakanal Prize for excellence, in addition to first prize for history and French composition, and, in a national competition, first prize for Greek.

In 1903, after completing a period of required military service, Giraudoux entered the renowned École Normale Supérieure in Paris, first studying French literature before changing to German studies. He visited Germany on a fellowship in 1905 and spent a year in Munich working as a tutor for Paul Morand, who became a writer and diplomat as well as Giraudoux's friend. Traveling throughout central Europe during this time, Giraudoux observed the radical division of Germanic and Gallic influences in Europe, an issue that would figure prominently in much of his work.

#### ***From a Reluctant Journalist to a Diplomat***

Between 1904 and 1906, Giraudoux published his first sketches and stories, some of which were included in *Provincials*, his first book. After he returned to Paris in 1906, he discovered that he had little interest in a career in education after a short stint of student teaching. Nonetheless, friends arranged for him a position as a visiting French-language assistant at Harvard University. When he returned to Paris in 1908, Giraudoux worked for a daily paper to which he contributed some of his own stories under a pseudonym. At the same time, he had other stories published in prestigious magazines.

In 1910 Giraudoux began an active foreign-service career, which included a position as the chief of information and press services of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Traveling extensively for his job, he was one of the well-known diplomatic travelers among twentieth-century writers, a group that included Paul Claudel and Jean-Paul Sartre. A romantic encounter with Suzanne Boland, wife of a military officer, Paul Pineau, began in 1913, resulting in both Pineau's challenging Giraudoux to a duel, which never took place, and, eventually, Suzanne's divorce. She gave birth to Giraudoux's only child in 1919, and the couple was married in 1921, a fact that led some early biographers to create a false date for the marriage to protect Giraudoux's reputation.

#### ***Military Service and a New Career as Dramatist***

Giraudoux served in the military during World War I. After being wounded in the infamous Battle of the Marne—in which over two million men fought and more than five hundred thousand soldiers were killed or wounded—and again in the Dardanelles, he returned to service in the war ministry and then the foreign ministry. Having contracted dysentery while on diplomatic business in Turkey, Giraudoux was hospitalized eleven times due to injuries and illness related to war. Another lingering effect of the war was Giraudoux's apprehension regarding France's postwar reconciliation with Germany. This apprehension formed the subject of *My Friend from Limousin* (1922), a novel that was immediately admired.

A 1927 meeting with the actor and director Louis Jouvet proved to be a momentous occasion in Giraudoux's life. With Jouvet's encouragement and technical advice, Giraudoux adapted *My Friend from Limousin* for the stage. After the play's instant success under the direction of Jouvet, Giraudoux embarked on a new career in drama at the age of forty-five. Almost every year during the 1930s, Jouvet brought out a new Giraudoux play, placing Giraudoux among the most popular playwrights in Europe until his death in 1944.

### **Works in Literary Context**

**Classical Roots** As evidenced by his own adaptations of stories from Greek mythology and the Bible, Giraudoux's work was significantly influenced by that of Jean Racine (1639–1699), whose tragedies were derived from various classical sources. Perhaps the most inspirational force in Giraudoux's career—and definitely in his career as a dramatist—was his collaboration with actor and director Louis Jouvet. For fifteen years, the pair enchanted Parisian audiences with productions of tragedies laced with irony and intellectual literary wit. Each man admired the other for his artistic gifts. Undoubtedly, Giraudoux and Jouvet complemented each other's strengths: Jouvet's imagination for staging scenes offered the perfect scenarios for Giraudoux's verbal virtuosity.

**Clashing Cultures** Contemplative of the gravest of human problems, Giraudoux's work demonstrates a passionate concern for the human condition, even as he introduces such fantastical elements as the encounter between the mundane and the supernatural. One of his key themes is the differences to be found between people of different cultures, specifically the French and Germans. This is observed in *My Friend from Limousin*, in which a French soldier struck with amnesia believes himself to be German; he returns "home" to Germany but finds it difficult to fit in. This theme is also addressed in the play *Tiger at the Gates* (1935), set the day before the beginning of the Trojan War. Although Hector offers sound reasons for the Trojans and the Greeks to work out their differences, other forces suggest that conflict is inevitable. Many viewed this work as a parallel to the relationship between France and Germany prior to World War II.

**Ethereal Women** Although most of the male characters in Giraudoux's theatrical works are brilliantly portrayed, the females in his dramas are often the most interesting. Giraudoux's optimistic, idealistic image of a pure, ethereal woman is juxtaposed with the coarseness and tedium of everyday life. In Giraudoux's plays, the true woman is a natural, instinctive creature endowed with subtle and delicate sensibility. Above all, she is the only one who could discover the poetic possibilities within common existence; she is compassionate and rare. Giraudoux's vision insists that the absolute or the ideal is



the only meaningful goal of humanity, and his female protagonists—from Electra in *Electra* to Lucile in *Duel of Angels* to Lia in *Sodom and Gomorrah*—personify this vision. In this, Giraudoux participates in a tradition that extends far behind and in front of him. Particularly in Christian cultures, the distinction between “perfect Madonna” (the Virgin Mary) and “fallen woman” or “whore” has been a key trope for (mostly male) writers ranging from St. Augustine all the way up to Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner.

### Works in Critical Context

In general, most critics agree that Giraudoux’s fiction and drama show superb craftsmanship. Early criticism tended to fault the “preciosity” of his language—that is, its elaborate affectation and excessive, maudlin refinement. As such, some scholars reject Giraudoux’s art as artificial and insignificant, too self-consciously literary and overly dependent upon its appeal to sensitive audiences. Because Giraudoux’s language, contends Robert Cohen, “is at once lyrical, witty, and searching, often turning on paradox,” the playwright was accused of verbal overindulgence. Cohen goes so far as to state that “words came too easily for him.” Nevertheless, most modern critics concede that Giraudoux’s ornamental language and “preciosity” are suited to his unique style of writing.

***Mankind’s Last Recourse*** Wallace Fowlie has documented the fact that Giraudoux called himself a “journalist of the theater.” As Giraudoux gauged the receptivity and intelligence of his audience, so did the public evaluate his style and purpose. What they found, says Fowlie, was that “Giraudoux believed fervently in the cause of literature. He believed that literature was the last recourse of mankind.” Still, some critics questioned his commitment to both art and the concerns he presents in his work. These are the same detractors who criticize his characters as vague, undeveloped creations that confuse allegory, symbol, and reality instead of revealing any kind of truth.

***Life’s Truths*** Giraudoux’s supporters, however, see his legacy as a writer as being due to his treatment of such serious themes as love, death, war, and humanity’s relationship to the universe. According to Robert Emmet Jones:

Giraudoux is the only contemporary French playwright . . . who has created a dramatic world at all comparable to those of the great dramatists of the past. His world contains people of all social classes and all educational levels, and whether they be ancient Greeks, Biblical characters, or provincial Frenchmen, they transcend their times and become as universal in significance as any characters in the modern drama.

Fowlie concurs, observing that Giraudoux’s theater “reveals to men the most surprising and the most simple truths, which they never fully realize, such as the inevitability of life, the inevitability of death, the meaning of

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Giraudoux’s famous contemporaries include:

**Ezra Pound** (1885–1972): Born in the United States, Pound spent much of his adult life in Europe, where his poetry helped establish and define the modernist movement.

**James Joyce** (1882–1941): Joyce, an Irish-born novelist who lived in Italy and France, experimented with form and narrative in his modernist works.

**Franz Kafka** (1883–1924): Kafka’s fiction presents the dehumanization and isolation of the individual in twentieth-century society.

**Pablo Picasso** (1881–1973): A painter and sculptor, Picasso influenced most major art movements of the twentieth century, including surrealism and abstract expressionism.

**Jerome Kern** (1885–1945): Kern, who established the staged musical as an art form, wrote *Showboat*, which includes the famous song “Ol’ Man River.”

**Erwin Rommel** (1891–1944): Rommel was called the “Desert Fox” because of the skillful German military campaigns he waged in North Africa during World War II.

happiness and catastrophe, the fact that life is both reality and dream.” Giraudoux, it would seem, remains an important writer because of his distinct and interesting vision of the world.

### Responses to Literature

1. Research French theater from 1900 to 1945, noting major authors, literary movements, historical figures, and world events taking place that had an effect on drama during that time period. Create a timeline that displays the facts you have learned. Designate one side of the timeline for people and the other side for literary movements and historical events.
2. Because of the creative spirit of French literary and artistic movements at the beginning of the twentieth century, many writers were drawn to France—Paris, in particular. Using your library, the Internet, or other available resources, find at least five writers or artists who moved to France to enjoy this creative environment. Why do you think France became such a center of artistic activity at this time? Were any works produced there that could not have been produced elsewhere? If so, what were they? Why could they have been made or published only in France?
3. Compare Giraudoux’s play *Tigers at the Gate* with ancient legends of the Trojan War such as Homer’s

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The collaboration between Giraudoux and Louis Jouvet was a key factor in Giraudoux's success as a playwright. Artistically, the men had complete trust in one another's creative processes. Because the magic of Giraudoux's dramatic speech was a crucial element of his plays, Jouvet faithfully followed the text. In fact, Jouvet once remarked that "he had to teach his actors how to speak the text rather than act it," notes scholar Wallace Fowlie. Listed below are other works that have resulted from the collaboration of creative minds:

*The Waste Land* (1922), a poem by T. S. Eliot. The poem's original manuscript of around 800 lines was cut to 443 by Ezra Pound, a fellow poet who edited and annotated the work in what many scholars consider a brilliant, creative act in itself.

*What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981), a collection of short stories by Raymond Carver. In addition to cutting about half of the manuscript's original words, writer and editor Gordon Lish rewrote the endings of ten of the thirteen stories in this collection.

*Lyrical Ballads* (1798), a compilation of poems by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This important work of the English Romantic movement included "Tintern Abbey," one of Wordsworth's most famous poems, and Coleridge's renowned "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

*Iliad*. How does each work depict the prospect of war? It has been said that Giraudoux used the Trojans and Greeks to parallel the tenuous relationship between France and Germany throughout the first third of the twentieth century. Which do you think Giraudoux intended the Trojans to represent—France or Germany? Why?

4. The premise of Giraudoux's play *The Apollo of Bellac* involves a sheltered woman who is told the secret to controlling men: Compliment a man's looks, and he will do whatever you ask. Do you think this is a valid observation? Why or why not? Do you think the opposite technique would work for a man complimenting women? Why or why not?
5. Why do you think Giraudoux did not begin writing plays until he was in his forties? In your opinion, would Giraudoux have ever written plays if he had not met Louis Jouvet?

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## Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

BORN: 1749, Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany

DIED: 1832, Weimar, Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, Germany

NATIONALITY: German

GENRE: Poetry, Fiction, drama, nonfiction

### MAJOR WORKS:

*The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774)

*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795)

*Faust, Part One* (1808)

*Faust, Part Two* (1832)

### Overview

Though he lived in late eighteenth-century Germany, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was a true Renaissance man whose influence touched not only literature, poetry, and drama, but ranged into philosophy, theology, and science. Best known for his novels and poems, Goethe influenced a generation of philosophers and scientists and created some of Germany's best-known works of literature. History has ranked Goethe alongside William Shakespeare, Homer, and Dante Alighieri: in the words of Napoleon I upon meeting the eminent poet, "There's a man!"

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was born in Frankfurt-am-Main in the state of Hesse in Germany on August 28, 1749. The eldest son of an imperial counselor and the mayor's daughter, Goethe balanced the personalities of



Johann Wolfgang von Goethe von Goethe, Johann Wolfgang, 1828 painting by Joseph Stieler. AP Images.

his reserved, stern father, Johann Kaspar Goethe, and his impulsive, imaginative mother, Katharina Elisabeth Textor Goethe.

**Law Degree and Attempts at Writing** Goethe was educated at home by his father and private tutors, who taught him languages, drawing, dancing, riding, and other subjects. The theater would have a profound impact on Goethe, who was allowed free access to the performances of a French theatrical troupe when the French occupied Frankfurt during the Seven Years War (1756–1763). He began writing early, composing religious poems, a prose epic, and even his first novel, which was written in German, French, Italian, English, Latin, Greek, and Yiddish, by the time he was sixteen years old.

Though he was more interested in literature than law, Goethe obeyed his father's wishes and began studying law in Leipzig in 1768. At this time, Goethe composed some of his early plays and poems. After going home in 1768 to recover from a serious illness, Goethe went to Strasbourg in 1770 to complete his law degree.

In Strasbourg, Goethe engrossed himself in reading, artistic discovery, and writing. There, he met Johann Gottfried Herder, a philosopher and poet who introduced him to new literary works, including the novels of English writers Laurence Sterne, Oliver Goldsmith, and Henry Fielding, that would prove influential in his later writing.

**Doomed Love Affairs and the *Sturm und Drang* Sensation** After returning to Frankfurt to practice law in 1771, Goethe also launched his writing career. In addition to his legal practice, he visited with literary friends, wrote book reviews, traveled in Germany and Switzerland, and fell in love three times. It was the falling in love that would have the greatest impact on his career as a writer. Each relationship ended in tragedy: his entanglement with Charlotte Buff ended when he discovered she was engaged to his friend; he then fell in love with a married woman; and his engagement to Anna Elisabeth Schönmann was broken off in September 1775. However painful these attachments, they inspired a number of poems, and Goethe became a kind of center for the *Sturm und Drang* ("Storm and Stress") artistic movement that was sweeping Germany.

Inspired by ancient poetry, the *Sturm und Drang* movement tried to establish new political, cultural, and literary forms for Germany as a replacement for the French neoclassical tradition that dominated much literature and culture. The German movement was characterized by extreme emotion, individual feeling, even irrationality—all responses to what was seen as the cold rationalism of French neoclassicism. The members of the German movement idolized writers like William Shakespeare, whom Goethe celebrated as a poet of nature, writing an influential speech on Shakespeare's birthday that would prove a major milestone for Shakespearean literary criticism. He began to imitate Shakespeare's dramatic style in his own prose plays, focusing also on satire and poetic dramas. However, his most influential work of the period, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*), would be inspired by the doomed relationship with Charlotte Buff that almost drove Goethe to suicide. This novel in letters, which explores themes of love, philosophy, religion, and nature, established Goethe as an overnight celebrity. The impact of *Werther* on Goethe's contemporaries is hard to overestimate: not only did "Werther fever" spread throughout Europe and Asia, but its sentimental tale of love and suicide encouraged a fad of melancholic, emotional romanticism.

**The Weimar Years** In 1775, Goethe received an invitation to join Duke Karl August, a young prince, in Weimar. Goethe, who was soon given a position of minister of state, would live there for the remainder of his life. He took on responsibility for the duchy's economic welfare, concerning himself with horticulture, agriculture, and mining; however, his growing responsibilities proved an irritating distraction from his writing. At this time, Goethe entered into an intense friendship with Charlotte von Stein, the wealthy wife of a court official and the most intellectual of Goethe's loves.

Though Goethe was a statesman and a writer, his interests extended to topics like alchemy, phrenology, botany, anatomy, and medicine. He made important

discoveries in anatomy and even came up with an influential theory on plant metamorphosis. Overburdened by competing interests and responsibilities, Goethe fled to Italy in 1786, taking a journey that would turn out to be an act of artistic rebirth.

**Italian Journey for Artistic Inspiration** In Italy, Goethe kept a detailed diary for Charlotte von Stein. In it, he recorded his reflections and inspirations, from his observations of the customs of the people to his studies of painting, sculpture, botany, geology, and history. He revised three influential “classical” plays: *Egmont*, *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, and *Torquato Tasso*. In these plays he drew on themes of conflicted love, intrigue, and mythology.

Upon his return to Weimar in 1788, Goethe experienced several life changes. He was relieved of all of his official duties aside from association with the court theater and libraries, and his relationship with Charlotte von Stein came to an end. Around this time, he entered into a relationship with Christiane Vulpius, a woman who would become his wife and bear him several children, of whom only one, Julius August Walther, would survive. The uneducated Vulpius was looked down upon by Goethe’s courtly friends, who cruelly referred to her as Goethe’s “fatter half.”

Unconcerned by public opinion, Goethe continued to study and write, though his literary output in the 1790s was sparse compared to that of his earlier years. After his Italian journey, Goethe was increasingly interested in classicism, writing his *Roman Elegies* during this time. These poems, which show a German traveler finding gradual acceptance into a Roman world of history, art, and classical poetry, were considered scandalous upon publication, but are now considered among the generation’s greatest love poems.

**Friendship with Schiller and Major Literary Achievements** During this time, Goethe formed one of the most influential relationships of his life: a friendship with Friedrich von Schiller, a poet and *Sturm und Drang* contemporary. After a rocky initial acquaintance, the pair formed a mutually supportive relationship, producing literary journals and helping forge a classical German literature. Hailed by key figures in Germany’s growing Romantic movement, Goethe continued to produce poems, plays, satire, and ballads.

Goethe’s next accomplishments would profoundly affect world literature: his novel *William Meister’s Apprenticeship* is considered a classic *Bildungsroman* (a novel that focuses on the protagonist’s growth from childhood to maturity). However, Wilhelm Meister was not Goethe’s only accomplishment during the 1790s: He rewrote and completed his dramatic poem *Faust* between the 1790s and 1808. The work, which tells of the legendary Dr. Faust’s deal with the devil, would prove immensely popular and influential, inspiring countless works of music, theater, and literature. The play can be

seen as a commentary on the pitfalls of the Industrial Revolution, a period of rapid modernization in agriculture, industry, and transportation that started in Europe in the late eighteenth century. Dr. Faust represents modern man’s thirst for dominion over nature. But nature, Goethe warns, has a power not fully understood by men, even geniuses like Faust, and mankind tinkers with nature at its peril.

**A Meeting with Napoléon** Around this time, Goethe’s friend Schiller died, and France’s emperor Napoléon and his army were marching from victory to victory across Europe. One such victory was at the Battle of Jena in 1806, which took place just twelve miles from Goethe’s home in Weimar. The French sacked Weimar, but Goethe’s home was spared because of Napoléon’s admiration of Goethe’s work. The feeling was mutual, apparently. Goethe kept a bust of Napoléon prominently on display in his study. The two famously met in 1808 and briefly discussed literature.

Goethe would continue to be productive for the remainder of his life, publishing an influential treatise on color, writing an autobiography, and recording his conversations and letters with luminaries of the era. Though his uncommon attitudes toward society and politics alienated him from many of his peers, Goethe was thought of as Germany’s greatest writer at the time of his death in 1832. His sequel to the first part of *Faust*, which was published after his death, is thought to be his most mature work. Goethe was buried next to his friend Friedrich von Schiller in Weimar.

## Works in Literary Context

Though Goethe’s plays and poems are considered among the finest in German literature, he was never shy about pointing out his many literary influences. In turn, his own work proved profoundly influential to writers of the *Sturm und Drang* and Romantic movements along with writers and intellectuals as diverse as Nikola Tesla and Hermann Hesse.

As a young man, Goethe read widely in French, Italian, and the classical languages, but his writing was as influenced by the intellectual society of eighteenth-century Germany as it was by literary figures. During his *Sturm und Drang* period, Goethe embraced writers such as William Shakespeare, Oliver Goldsmith, and Hans Sachs, a sixteenth-century German satirist, as well as classical figures such as Homer.

**The Bildungsroman** *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* is considered a classic example of the *Bildungsroman*, a story that follows the growth and maturation of a character from youth to maturity. English author Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1860), one of the most famous English-language *Bildungsromans* is considered a direct descendant of Goethe’s work. The *Bildungsroman* form has remained a favorite among fiction writers since Goethe’s time. Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847),

Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* (1915), Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* (1922), John Knowles's *A Separate Peace* (1959), and Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972) are all widely studied Bildungsromans.

**Defining German Literature and Culture** Much of Goethe's literary career concerned weighing the influences of other periods and searching for a German national language and literature. Unsatisfied by the French influence that saturated that period's philosophy and literature, Goethe turned to neoclassicism, upholding the influence of ancient writers, studying classical art and architecture, and embracing Roman ideals of beauty and culture.

Though he was never considered a true Romantic poet, Goethe's works had an undeniable influence in Romantic circles. His *The Sorrows of Young Werther* attracted a following that would go on to influence the moody writings of the young Romantics. During the last years of his life, he was considered a living monument to a German national literature he had helped create and define.

Goethe's influence was more than just literary: his philosophical works went on to inspire the likes of Friedrich Nietzsche, Carl Gustav Jung, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, while his scientific writings inspired Charles Darwin.

In addition to his literary and scientific influence, Goethe researched German cultural and folk traditions. His cultural research resulted in many of the Christmas traditions observed in the Western world today. In addition, Goethe's theories on geography and culture (namely, that history and geography shape personal habits) are still relevant today. His balanced view of rational thought and aesthetic beauty would go on to shape the work of artists and thinkers like Ludwig van Beethoven, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and many others.

### Works in Critical Context

Goethe was already considered the premier German poet and writer in his own lifetime and has since enjoyed a long career of critical success. However, the statement "Against criticism a man can neither protest nor defend himself; he must act in spite of it, and then it will gradually yield to him" is attributed to Goethe, implying that his critical reception was not always golden.

***The Sorrows of Young Werther*** Goethe was often a figure of public controversy, with his work criticized for its romantic and sexual content, its rejection of French Enlightenment ideals, and its pagan or antireligious themes. Though *The Sorrows of Young Werther* appeared to almost unanimous critical success, it was controversial for its romantic excess, which led to a rash of suicides among *Werther* fanatics.

After *Werther*, Goethe faded into semi-obscurity, reemerging with his classical plays and receiving acclaim from the young movement of Romantic poets who responded to his sensitivity and natural approach. He

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Goethe's famous contemporaries include:

**Arthur Schopenhauer** (1788–1860): a German philosopher best known for his work on the limits of human knowledge.

**Charles Darwin** (1809–1882): an English naturalist and originator of the theory of evolution.

**Jane Austen** (1775–1817): a British novelist known for her comedies of manners.

**Napoleon Bonaparte** (1769–1821): a French political leader known for his military prowess.

**Thomas Jefferson** (1743–1826): the third president of the United States and renowned inventor and philosopher.

**Emily Brontë** (1818–1848): a British novelist known for her classic novel *Wuthering Heights*.

was praised by Novalis, a Romantic philosopher and author, as "the true representative of the poetic spirit on earth;" however, Novalis and other Romantics soon turned against what they saw as Goethe's political apathy and elitist views. In his work *The Life of Goethe: A Critical Biography*, author John R. Williams points out that Goethe did not court good opinion during his life, but rather tried to bring other Germans up to his own standards of education and culture, remaining indifferent to public criticism.

***Faust*** Goethe's almost universally praised verse drama *Faust* is considered one of the world's greatest plays. Based on an old Christian legend that Goethe had seen dramatized in a puppet show during his childhood, *Faust* utilizes a mythological, magic-laced context to explore with broad appeal and compelling results the dilemma of modern man. Goethe's drama made the legendary figure of Faust one of the best-known literary characters of all time. The ever-seeking, never-satisfied Faust has come to symbolize the human struggle and yearning for knowledge, achievement, and glory. Critic George Santayana wrote that Faust "cries for air, for nature, for all existence." Few critics have found fault with the play, and those who have, like Margaret Fuller, fault Goethe only in comparisons to such titans of world literature as Dante. She wrote, "*Faust* contains the great idea of [Goethe's] life, as indeed there is but one great poetic idea possible to man—the progress of a soul through the various forms of existence. All his other works, whatever their miraculous beauty of execution, are mere chapters to this poem, illustrative of particular points. *Faust*, had it been completed in the spirit in which it was begun, would have been the *Divina Commedia* of its age." Fuller mainly



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* is considered to be the epitome of the *Bildungsroman*, a "self-cultivation" novel that follows a protagonist's development from childhood to maturity. Here are a few other examples of the genre:

*Persepolis* (2003), a graphic novel by Marjane Satrapi. This work chronicles the author's childhood in Iran during the Islamic Revolution.

*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943), a novel by Betty Smith. Smith traces the childhood and maturation of Francie Nolan, an Irish-American living in New York in the early twentieth century.

*David Copperfield* (1850), a novel by Charles Dickens. David Copperfield transforms from awkward child to writer in this classic English *Bildungsroman*.

*Harry Potter* series (1997–2007), novels by J.K. Rowling. The seven-book Potter series follows a young wizard and his friends as they grow up and take on adult responsibilities.

criticizes the second part of the play for being out of keeping with the first part.

**Politics and Culture** Goethe's critical reception after death has been mixed. His work was spurned by German nationalists who criticized his adoption of international philosophies, while his life was condemned as immoral due to his many love affairs, including one with a longtime live-in mistress. However, Goethe scholarship grew and changed, undergoing an important phase in the post-World War II years in which Germans grappled with questions of identity and national culture. Though more recent literary movements have tried to distance themselves from the German classical literature born in Weimar, Goethe scholarship has continued. Recent works of criticism have focused on Goethe's humor, his position in relation to Marxism, and his place between classical and Romantic literature.

### Responses to Literature

1. Goethe combined his literary work with studies in science, philosophy, history, and culture. What might such a broad set of interests have contributed to Goethe's literary work? Or might his varied interests have detracted from his work? Is there a particular area of study that is more reflected in his works than others? Explain.
2. *The Sorrows of Young Werther* set off an international sensation with its melancholy and overblown sentimentality. What other works of literature have

sparked international fads? How have those fads presented themselves and how long did they last? Why were those fads particularly popular?

3. Goethe was strongly influenced by his friendship with Friedrich von Schiller, a German poet next to whom he was buried. Using your library and the Internet, research another pair of influential writers whose friendship contributed to their literary work. What do you think attracted these two friends to one another?
4. *Faust* is considered one of the most influential works of German literature and has spawned a number of related works by other writers and artists. Using your library and the Internet, compare and contrast two separate adaptations of Goethe's *Faust*. Which of these adaptations holds more relevance for today's audience? How so?

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## Nikolai Gogol

BORN: 1809, Great Sorochyntsi, Poltava, Russia

DIED: 1852, Moscow, Russia

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Fiction, poetry

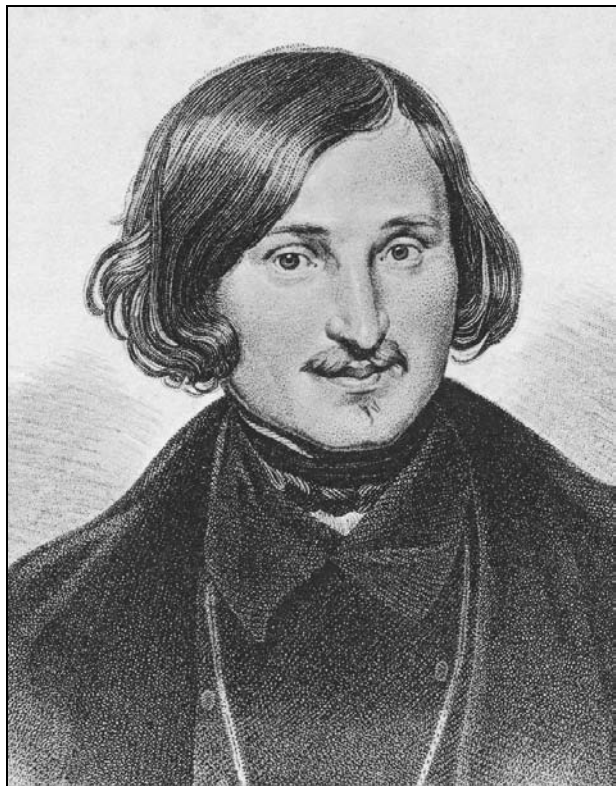
MAJOR WORKS:

*The Inspector General* (1836)

*Dead Souls* (1842)

"The Overcoat" (1842)

*The Gamblers* (1843)



Nikolai Gogol Hulton Archive / Getty Images

## Overview

Nikolai Gogol was an initiator of the Russian naturalist movement, which focused on descriptions of the lives of the lower classes of society. Gogol himself explored contemporary social problems, often in a satirical fashion. His best-known works—the novel *Dead Souls* (1842), the short story “The Overcoat” (1842), and the drama *The Inspector General* (1836)—are widely praised as masterpieces of Russian naturalism. Gogol is also seen by many as a progenitor of the modern short story. His fiction, written in a unique style that combines elements of realism, fantasy, comedy, and the grotesque, typically features complex psychological studies of individuals tormented by feelings of impotence, alienation, and frustration.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Boarding School, Vanity Publishing, and Friends in High Places** Born into a family of Ukrainian landowners, Gogol attended boarding school as a young boy, developing there an interest in literature and drama. After failing both to find employment as an actor and to sell his writing, Gogol used his own money to publish his epic poem *Hans Kuechelgarten* in 1829. When this work

received only negative reviews, the ambitious young man collected and burned all remaining copies of the book. Soon after, he obtained a civil service position in St. Petersburg and began writing *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka* (1831), a volume of mostly comic folktales set in his native Ukraine. In these stories, Gogol depicted the world of the Cossack peasantry through an engaging mixture of naturalism and fantasy. Immediately acclaimed as the work of a brilliant young writer, *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka* brought Gogol to the attention of celebrated poet Alexander Pushkin and noted critic Vissarion Belinsky, who had been an early champion of Pushkin and now recognized similar promise in Gogol. Pushkin proved to be Gogol’s strongest literary inspiration, and their association from 1831 to 1836 fostered Gogol’s most productive period.

**From Stories of Rural Life to the Alienation of the City** *Mirgorod* (1835), Gogol’s next cycle of stories, comprises four tales that encompass a variety of moods and styles. “Old-World Landowners” is a light satire of peasant life, while “Taras Bulba,” often referred to as the “Cossack *Iliad*,” is a serious historical novella that portrays the Cossack-Polish wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. “Viy,” described by Gogol as “a colossal product of folk-imagination,” is a tale of supernatural terror reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe, and “The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovich,” considered one of the most humorous stories in Russian letters, details the end of a long friendship due to a trifling argument.

The three stories in *Arabesques* (1835) rank among Gogol’s finest works. In a shift from Ukrainian settings to the more cosmopolitan milieu of St. Petersburg where he now lived, these pieces form part of what were termed Gogol’s Petersburg Tales. These stories reveal the city as nonsensical, depersonalized, and dreamlike. In “Diary of a Madman,” Gogol’s only first-person narrative, he recounts in diary form events that lead to a minor civil servant’s delusion that he is the king of Spain. This story has been interpreted as an indictment of the dehumanizing effects of Russian bureaucracy and a comment on the futility of ambition. Gogol wrote against the backdrop of growing dissatisfaction with the absolute authority of the czar (the Russian monarch). In 1825, St. Petersburg had seen the Decembrist revolt (so named because it took place in December), in which thousands of Russian soldiers led by officers who were members of the aristocracy refused to swear allegiance to the new czar, Nicholas I, and demanded instead that a constitution be put in place. Czar Nicholas put down the revolt, but revolutionary fervor continued to simmer.

**Dramas, Both Real and Imaginary** In 1836, *The Inspector General* was produced in St. Petersburg. This play, which is often considered the most original and

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gogol's famous contemporaries include:

**Alexander Pushkin** (1799–1837): Russian Romantic poet, considered by many to be his country's greatest poet and the founder of modern Russian literature. His style, which blended satire, drama, romance, and realistic speech, came to define Russian literary style.

**Nicholas I** (1796–1855): During his thirty-year reign, starting in 1825, Nicholas I carved out a reputation as one of the most repressive and reactionary of Russian czars.

**Leo Tolstoy** (1828–1910): Considered one of the greatest novelists of all time, Tolstoy wrote works, particularly *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, that are considered the pinnacle of realist literature.

**Nathaniel Hawthorne** (1804–1864): Like Gogol, Hawthorne was a master of the short story. His tales focused mostly on Colonial American history, most famously his work *The Scarlet Letter*, a tale of hypocrisy and guilt in Puritan New England.

**Giuseppe Garibaldi** (1807–1882): Considered a national hero in Italy, Garibaldi was one of the leading figures in the *Risorgimento*, or reunification, of Italy in the nineteenth century.

enduring comedy in the history of Russian theater, examines the reactions of the prominent figures of a provincial Russian town to the news that a government inspector will be arriving incognito to assess municipal affairs. An impoverished traveler named Khlestakov, who is mistaken for the expected official, is bribed and treated like royalty; he attempts to seduce the mayor's wife and daughter, becomes betrothed to the latter, and departs shortly before the town's residents learn of their mistake and anticipate the arrival of the real government inspector. In this simple plot, constructed within the framework of perverse logic typical of his works, Gogol mocked both Russian officialdom and farcical literary conventions.

Although the play was an indictment of Russian bureaucracy, it passed the rigid censorship of the time because Czar Nicholas I had read and admired the drama. He ordered all his ministers to attend the premiere and announced, as the final curtain fell, "Everyone has got his due, and I most of all." However, despite the czar's official sanction, the play was violently attacked by a number of influential people who denied that it contained a single honest character. Stung by this criticism, Gogol moved to Italy in 1836, and, except for two brief visits home, remained abroad for twelve years. Most of this time was spent writing *Dead Souls*, perhaps his most

enduring work of all. Although he had originally planned this as a lighthearted novel, Gogol decided instead to create an epic in several volumes that would depict all elements of Russian life.

***Social Critique and Death at the Direction of a Priest*** Gogol's final two Petersburg Tales, "The Nose" and "The Overcoat," published as part of *Sochineniya* (1842), were also written at this time. They are considered among the greatest short stories in world literature. Both pieces exhibit Gogol's subtle intertwining of humor and pathos and, like "Diary of a Madman," focus on the bizarre fate of petty government officials.

Toward the end of his life, Gogol became increasingly convinced that his works should spiritually enrich his readers. *Selected Passages of Correspondence with My Friends* (1847), a collection of didactic essays and letters, which many of Gogol's previous admirers condemned as reactionary, reflects this growing religious and moral interest. Following the critical failure of *Selected Passages from Correspondence with My Friends*, Gogol recommenced composition on a second section of his novel *Dead Souls*, a project he had previously abandoned due to a nervous breakdown. By this time, however, Gogol had fallen under the influence of Matthew Konstantinovsky, a maniacal priest who insisted that he burn his manuscript and enter a monastery. Gogol agonized over the decision but finally complied, convinced that this act would save him from damnation. At Konstantinovsky's insistence, Gogol undertook an ascetic regimen in order to cleanse his soul. He began a fast that weakened his already precarious health and died shortly thereafter. Following his death, a small portion of the second part of *Dead Souls* was discovered and published, but critics generally agree that the sequel does not demonstrate the mastery of the first section. Taken as a whole, *Dead Souls* is one of Russia's great abolitionist texts, focusing Gogol's satirical lens on the absurdities of the system of serfdom in Russia, which functioned as more or less a mode of slavery. While the first section of *Dead Souls* concentrated on the problems of the system, the unfinished second section was originally intended to offer solutions. As it happened, though, the manuscript went into the flames and the institution of serfdom was not abolished in Russia until 1861, well after Gogol's death. Though Gogol's critical appeal had waned during his final years, his funeral still brought out thousands of mourners. Commenting on the throngs, a passerby asked "Who is this man who has so many relatives at his funeral?" A mourner responded, "This is Nikolai Gogol, and all of Russia is his relative."

### Works in Literary Context

Nikolai Vasil'evich Gogol is the father of Russia's Golden Age of prose realism. Later nineteenth-century Russian authors wrote in the shadow of Gogol's thematics and sweeping aesthetic vision, while even twentieth-century

modernists acknowledge Gogol as an inspiration. Many readers compare Gogol's genius with that of Miguel de Cervantes, Laurence Sterne, and James Joyce. Gogol's work shows an extraordinary capacity for the manipulation of language, a confusion of the ridiculous and sublime, and a conflicted desire to capture in verbal images the cultural essence of Russia.

### ***Social Realism or Spirituality in Decline?***

While most readers of Gogol's day construed "The Overcoat" as an example of social realism, believing that the author displayed deep sympathy for his beleaguered hero, later scholars have viewed the story from a psychological perspective, asserting that the overcoat symbolizes a mask that enables Akaky to disguise his spiritual destitution. Others have taken a metaphysical viewpoint, interpreting the ironic loss of the coat and Akaky's futile pleas for help as indicative of humanity's spiritual desolation in an indifferent cosmos. Despite such diverse views, critics have consistently noted the resonant irony and lyrical power with which Gogol invested this story.

***Stifling Bureaucracies*** In many of his works, Gogol focused on characters employed by governmental bureaucracies. This is true of the mysterious Inspector General in the play of the same name, and of Akaky Akakyvitch in "The Overcoat." There as elsewhere, Gogol focuses on how different levels of bureaucrats are treated by those around them, and how they fit into the rest of Russian society. The author depicts bureaucracy as a trap of sorts, in which a person's true desires and goals must be suppressed in order to fit in as a productive part of the governmental machine. In this, there was an implicit—though generally not explicit—critique of the czarist system that produced such bureaucracies in the first place.

### ***The Overcoat behind Modern Russian Literature***

Gogol's influence on Russian literature continued into the twentieth century and is most evident in the poetry of the Russian Symbolists. Such poets as Andrey Bely and Aleksandr Blok cite Gogol's rich prose and "visionary" language as embodiments of supreme fantasy. Yet many critics maintain that Gogol's mixture of realism and satire has proved most influential and remains his greatest achievement. Dostoyevsky acknowledged Russian literature's vast debt to Gogol by stating simply, "We all came out from under Gogol's 'Overcoat.'"

## **Works in Critical Context**

Despite praise and recognition from his critics and readers, Gogol has been one of the most misunderstood writers of the modern age. The swarm of seemingly irrelevant details, inconsistencies, and contradictions that characterize Gogol's life and work have misled readers who look for monolithic purpose or truth. In his critical biography of Gogol, Victor Erlich says that "we are still

## **COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE**

Many of Gogol's works are considered indictments of the soul-numbing effect of bureaucracy. Here are some other works that examine the power of bureaucracies:

*The Trial* (1925), a novel by Franz Kafka. This novel, published after the author's death, involves a man arrested, prosecuted, and executed for an unspecified crime.

*Catch-22* (1961), a novel by Joseph Heller. This satirical novel takes aim at the U.S. military. The title comes from a fictional "catch" in the rule book that prevents any soldier from avoiding combat on the basis of insanity.

*Brazil* (1985), a film directed by Terry Gilliam. This cult classic set in a dull dystopia in the future features a hero who dreams of escape from a mind-numbing bureaucratic job.

far from agreement as to the nature of his genius, the meaning of his bizarre art, and his still weirder life." Vladimir Nabokov calls Gogol "the strangest prose-poet Russia has ever produced."

***Dead Souls*** Liberal Russian critics called *Dead Souls* a true reflection of life, and gave Gogol the title of "supreme realist." Realism, according to Belinsky, required a simple plot, a faithful representation of everyday life, and a humorous exposure of the negative aspects of Russian society. Belinsky saw in *Dead Souls* the embodiment of these ideals, and considered it a plea for Russian writers to fight for civilization, culture, and humankind. More recently, *Guardian* reviewer A. S. Byatt has suggested that Gogol "resembles [Charles] Dickens in the way in which everything he started to imagine transformed itself and began to wriggle with life," and that *Dead Souls* "has that free and joyful energy of a work of art that is the first of its kind, with no real models to fear or emulate."

## **Responses to Literature**

1. For over a century, beginning in the 1830s, debate raged among Russian thinkers over the role of Western influence on Russian culture and society. The two camps were called the "Westernizers" and the "Slavophiles"; Gogol was associated in his lifetime with the Westernizers. Research the two perspectives. Upon reading Gogol, would you place him in the Westernizer camp, as his contemporaries did? Could you make the argument that he was actually a Slavophile? Why or why not?

2. Choose one of Gogol's shorter stories and analyze its cultural and historical elements. What does the story tell you about nineteenth-century Russian society?
3. In Gogol's story "The Overcoat," how does the point of view of the narrator affect the way the story is told? How would it have been different if the story was told in the third person? How much like Gogol do you feel the narrator is?
4. The novel *Dead Souls* is incomplete thanks in part to the advice of a religious fanatic. Research the background of religion in nineteenth-century Russia, and what led to Gogol's decision to follow the fanatic's advice.

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## William Golding

BORN: 1911, St. Columb, England

DIED: 1993, Perranarworthal, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

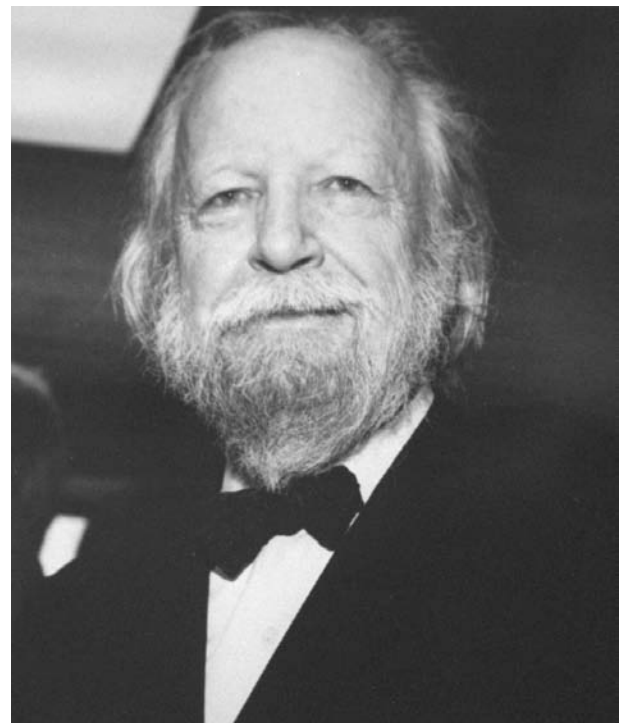
*Lord of the Flies* (1954)

*Darkness Visible* (1979)

*Rites of Passage* (1980)

### Overview

William Golding was a British novelist, poet, and Nobel Prize laureate. With the appearance of *Lord of the Flies* (1954), Golding's first published novel, the author began his career as both a campus cult favorite and one of the most distinctive and debated literary talents of his era. The author's prolific output—five novels in ten years—and the high quality of his work established him as one of the late twentieth century's most distinguished writers. He won the Booker Prize for literature in 1980 for *Rites of Passage*, the first book of his *To the Ends of the Earth* trilogy. Golding has been described as pessimistic, mythical, and spiritual—an allegorist who uses his novels as a canvas to paint portraits of man's constant struggle between his civilized self and his hidden, darker nature.



William Golding Golding, William, photograph. The Library of Congress.



## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***Probing the Darkness*** Golding was born in England's west country in 1911. His father, Alex, was a follower in the family tradition of schoolmasters; his mother, Mildred, was a political activist for women getting the right to vote. The family home in Marlborough is characterized by Stephen Medcalf in *William Golding* as "darkness and terror made objective in the flint-walled cellars of their fourteenth-century house . . . and in the graveyard by which it stood." By the time Golding was seven years old, Medcalf continues, "he had begun to connect the darkness . . . with the ancient Egyptians. From them he learnt, or on them he projected, mystery and symbolism, a habit of mingling life and death, and an attitude of mind sceptical of the scientific method that descends from the Greeks."

After graduating from Oxford, Golding perpetuated family tradition by becoming a schoolmaster in Salisbury, Wiltshire. His teaching career was interrupted in 1940, however, when World War II found "Schoolie," as he was called, serving five years in the Royal Navy. Lieutenant Golding saw active duty in the North Atlantic, commanding a rocket-launching craft. Present at the sinking of the *Bismarck* and participating in the D-Day invasion of France by Allied forces, Golding later told Joseph Wershba of the *New York Post*: "World War Two was the turning point for me. I began to see what people were capable of doing." Indeed, the author's anxieties about both nuclear war and the potential savagery of humankind were the basis of the novel *Lord of the Flies*.

***Writing to Please Himself*** On returning to his post at Bishop Wordsworth's School in 1945, Golding, who had enhanced his knowledge of Greek history and mythology by reading while at sea, attempted to further his writing career. He produced three novel manuscripts that remained unpublished. "All that [the author] has divulged about these [works] is that they were attempts to please publishers and that eventually they convinced him that he should write something to please himself," notes Bernard S. Oldsey. That ambition was realized in 1954, when Golding created *Lord of the Flies*.

For fifteen years after World War II, Golding concentrated his reading in the classical Greeks, and his viewpoint seems close to the Greek picture of humans at the mercy of powers erupting out of the darkness around and within individuals. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1983, and in his address at the awards ceremony, he said that the English language was possibly suffering from "too wide a use rather than too narrow a one." Stressing the significance of stories, Golding also expressed his concern with the state of the planet and raised the question of environmental issues. He then focused on the writer's craft, saying that words "may through the luck of writers prove to be the most powerful thing in the world."

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Golding's famous contemporaries include:

**J. D. Salinger** (1919–): A reclusive author who wrote *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), a classic novel about adolescence and the painful journey to responsibility and maturity—perhaps the main rival for *Lord of the Flies* in high school student popularity.

**Winston Churchill** (1874–1965): Prime minister of Great Britain from 1940 until 1945. Churchill's inspirational speeches were perhaps just as influential as his determination and brilliant military strategies in guiding Britain and her allies to victory in World War II.

**Francis Ford Coppola** (1939–): American film director who is behind some of the most detailed explorations of the violent psychology that has shaped twentieth-century culture: *Apocalypse Now* and the trilogy of *Godfather* movies.

**Joseph Campbell** (1904–1987): An American professor who became an expert on world mythologies, demonstrating in a series of widely popular books and media presentations that the great stories and religious mythologies throughout history share a limited number of recurring patterns and powerful spiritual symbols.

**Elie Wiesel** (1928–): A Jewish Holocaust survivor who has written over forty novels, memoirs, and political tracts, the most famous of which is *Night*, his memorable account of his imprisonment in several concentration camps in Germany and Austria during World War II. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986.

## Works in Literary Context

***Savagery Versus Civilized Behavior*** While the story has been compared to such previous works as *Robinson Crusoe* and *High Wind in Jamaica*, Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* is actually the author's "answer" to nineteenth-century writer R. M. Ballantyne's children's classic *The Coral Island: A Tale of the Pacific Ocean*. These two books share the same basic plot line and even some of the same character names. Although some similarities exist, *Lord of the Flies* totally reverses Ballantyne's concept of the purity and innocence of youth and humanity's ability to remain civilized under the worst conditions. In *Lord of the Flies*, Golding presented the central theme of his collective works: the conflict between the forces of light and dark within the human soul. Although the novel did not gain popularity in the United States until several years after its original publication, it has now become a modern classic, most often studied in high schools and colleges.

***Shift of Perspective*** While none of Golding's subsequent works achieved the critical success of *Lord of the Flies*

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

*Lord of the Flies* shows that when people are abandoned in a faraway place, far from traditional external authorities, their deepest nature is exposed. Here are some other works that also explore humanity's place in the wilds of the world.

*Paradise Lost* (1667), an epic poem by John Milton. This extended meditation on the nature of Good and Evil takes the form of an epic poem about Satan's rebellion in Heaven, his subsequent banishment to Hell, and his attempts to get revenge on God by spoiling His new creation of Adam and Eve in Paradise.

*Robinson Crusoe* (1719), a novel by Daniel Defoe. What started out as a fake travel narrative of a sailor marooned on a deserted island has become a classic tale of self-reliance. One of the earliest British novels, this book has helped define the British middle-class ethics of faith, self-control, and hard work ever since.

*Gulliver's Travels* (1726), a work of fiction by Jonathan Swift. The best known of Jonathan Swift's works, this classic of English literature is a satire on human nature and a parody of the popular travel narratives of the time. Gulliver becomes marooned in various exotic locations, and Swift uses the situations for everything from outrageous comedy to searing satire on the human condition.

*Cast Away* (2000), a film directed by Robert Zemeckis. This movie, starring Tom Hanks, is about a time-obsessed Federal Express systems engineer who finds himself alone on a tropical island after a plane crash.

he continued to produce novels that attracted widespread critical interpretation. Within the thematic context of exploring the depths of human depravity, the settings of Golding's works range from the prehistoric age, as in *The Inheritors* (1955); to the Middle Ages, as in *The Spire* (1964); to contemporary English society. This wide variety of settings, tones, and structures presents dilemmas to critics attempting to categorize them. Nevertheless, certain stylistic devices are characteristic of his work. One of these, the use of a sudden shift of perspective, has been so dramatically employed by Golding that it has both enchanted and infuriated critics and readers alike. For example, *Pincher Martin* (1956) is the story of Christopher Martin, a naval officer who is stranded on a rock in the middle of the ocean after his ship has been torpedoed. The entire book relates Martin's struggles to remain alive against all odds. The reader learns in the last few pages that Martin's death occurred on the second page—a fact that transforms the novel from a struggle for earthly survival into a struggle for eternal salvation.

**Morality** By 1965, Golding had produced six novels and was evidently on his way to continuing acclaim and

popular acceptance—but then matters changed abruptly. The writer's output dropped dramatically: For the next fifteen years he produced no novels and only a handful of novellas, short stories, and occasional pieces. Of this period, *The Pyramid*, a collection of three related novellas, is generally regarded as one of the writer's weaker efforts. Golding's reintroduction to the literary world was acknowledged in 1979 with the publication of *Darkness Visible*, the title of which derived from John Milton's famous description of Hell in *Paradise Lost*. From the first scenes of the book, Golding confronts the reader with images of fire, mutilation, and pain, which he presents in biblical terms. Samuel Hynes observed in a *Washington Post Book World* article,

[He is] still a moralist, still a maker of parables. To be a moralist you must believe in good and evil, and Golding does; indeed, you might say that the nature of good and evil is his only theme. To be a parable-maker you must believe that moral meaning can be expressed in the very fabric of the story itself, and perhaps that some meanings can only be expressed in this way; and this, too, has always been Golding's way.

**Myth and Allegory** Golding's novels are often termed fables or myths. They are laden with symbols (usually of a spiritual or religious nature) so imbued with meaning that they can be interpreted on many different levels. *The Spire*, for example, is perhaps his most polished allegorical novel, equating the erecting of a cathedral spire with the protagonist's conflict between his religious faith and the temptations to which he is exposed.

### Works in Critical Context

The novel that established Golding's reputation, *Lord of the Flies*, was rejected by twenty-one publishers before Faber & Faber accepted the forty-three-year-old schoolmaster's book. Initially, the tale of a group of schoolboys stranded on an island during their escape from atomic war received mixed reviews and sold only modestly in its hardcover edition. But when the paperback edition was published in 1959, thus making the book more accessible to students, the novel began to sell briskly. Teachers, aware of the student interest and impressed by the strong theme and stark symbolism of the work, assigned *Lord of the Flies* to their literature classes. And as the novel's reputation grew, critics reacted by drawing scholarly theses out of what was previously dismissed as just another adventure story.

While he has faced extensive criticism and categorization in his writing career, the author is able to provide a brief, simple description of himself in Jack I. Biles's *Talk: Conversations with William Golding*:

I'm against the picture of the artist as the starry-eyed visionary not really in control or knowing what he does. I think I'd almost prefer the word 'craftsman.' He's like one of the old-fashioned shipbuilders, who conceived the boat in their mind and then, after that, touched every single piece that

went into the boat. They were in complete control; they knew it inch by inch, and I think the novelist is very much like that.

**Lord of the Flies** *Lord of the Flies* has been interpreted by some as being Golding's response to the popular artistic notion of the 1950s that youth was a basically innocent collective and that they are the victims of adult society (as seen in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*). In 1960, C. B. Cox deemed *Lord of the Flies* as "probably the most important novel to be published . . . in the 1950s." Cox, writing in *Critical Quarterly*, continued: [To] succeed, a good story needs more than sudden deaths, a terrifying chase and an unexpected conclusion. *Lord of the Flies* includes all these ingredients, but their exceptional force derives from Golding's faith that every detail of human life has a religious significance. This is one reason why he is unique among new writers in the '50s. . . . Golding's intense conviction [is] that every particular of human life has a profound importance. His children are not juvenile delinquents, but human beings realising for themselves the beauty and horror of life.

Not every critic responded with admiration to *Lord of the Flies*, however. One of Golding's more vocal detractors is Kenneth Rexroth, who had this to say in the *Atlantic*: "Golding's novels are rigged. All thesis novels are rigged. In the great ones the drama escapes from the cage of the rigging or is acted out on it as on a skeleton stage set. Golding's thesis requires more rigging than most and it must by definition be escape-proof and collapsing." Rexroth elaborates: "[The novel] functions in a minimal ecology, but even so, and indefinite as it is, it is wrong. It's the wrong rock for such an island and the wrong vegetation. The boys never come alive as real boys. They are simply the projected annoyances of a disgruntled English schoolmaster."

## Responses to Literature

1. Why do you think Golding is so interested in the causes of violence and brutality? Research some of his interviews and consider his life history. Is it surprising that someone like Golding would be so involved in writing about the psychology of violence and be able to do it with such insight?
2. What exactly is the definition of a "fable," and how does it apply to *Lord of the Flies* and Golding's other works?
3. Many reality television shows today play on the stranded-on-a-deserted-island motif. Do you think that shows such as *Survivor* demonstrate the same psychology we see in *Lord of the Flies*? In particular, you might want to research the short-lived show *Kid Nation*, which put forty children from ages eight to fifteen alone together in a deserted town to see how they would manage.
4. Scientist James Lovelock is the creator of an idea known as the Gaia hypothesis; this name was recommended to him by his acquaintance, William Golding. Research the Gaia hypothesis. What are the basic ideas behind it? How did Golding's literary preferences lead him to come up with this name? Can you find any similarities between the Gaia hypothesis and Golding's views on humans and nature?

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## Carlo Goldoni

BORN: 1707, Venice, Italy

DIED: 1793, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: Italian

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Good Wife* (1749)

*The Arcadia in Brenta* (1749)

*The Hostess* (1753)

*The Boors* (1762)



Carlo Goldoni Goldoni, Carlo, engraving.

## Overview

Known as the reformer of Italian drama, Carlo Goldoni introduced elements of naturalism to the Italian stage. His innovative comedies, including *The Hostess* (1753) and *The Boors* (1762), placed a new emphasis on realistic representation in drama. The importance of Goldoni's contribution to Italian literature lies in his substitution for an outworn dramatic tradition with a new kind of comedy that has been called the comedy of character.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Childhood on the Move** Goldoni was born in Venice in 1707 to an upper-middle-class family. Throughout Goldoni's childhood, changing family fortunes and his father's medical practice necessitated frequent travel around the Italian peninsula, with the result that Goldoni obtained his early education at several different schools. At the time, Italy was not a unified country but a group of principalities, territories, and city-states that were sometimes hostile to each other. Political and military conflicts were on the rise, and the region was in the midst of an economic decline.

**Tumultuous Early Life** Goldoni's fascination with the theater manifested itself early. At the time, *commedia dell'arte*, an improvised type of comedy originating in medieval Italy, was in decline but still the leading theatrical form in what would become Italy. There were also some popular farces, and opera was still in its infancy. At the age of fourteen, while unwillingly studying medicine in Rimini, Goldoni became acquainted with the members of a traveling theater troupe. So entranced was he by their company that when the troupe left Rimini, Goldoni ran away to spend three days with the actors before returning to his family.

Goldoni's life was one of frequent upheavals, including a series of unsuitable love affairs. At age sixteen, he entered Ghislieri College in Pavia, from which he was expelled three years later for writing an unflattering satire of several young women of prominent Pavia families. He returned to the study of law in Udine, but due to another illicit romance was obliged to remove to Modena for further study. Here he developed and pursued an interest in religion and would have become a monk had his father not intervened.

After holding a number of jobs, Goldoni completed his law degree at the University of Padua in 1731 and because of a clerical error was admitted to the Venetian bar without serving the mandatory two-year apprenticeship. However, Goldoni never fully applied himself to the practice of law. He interrupted his legal career several times to accept various temporary government posts. His propensity for financial and romantic indiscretions also disrupted his career, frequently forcing him to move abruptly.

**Launched Career as a Dramatist** Goldoni's efforts in serious opera had an inauspicious beginning. By his own account he brought a new drama, *Amalasunta*, to Milan in 1732 in hopes of selling it to an opera director. During an informal gathering of a group of friends, including the great singer Caffarelli, he gave the drama its first public reading—and it was laughed to scorn—at least partially because he had ignored most of the conventional “rules” of the genre. In the years to come, however, his willingness to ignore the “rules” would eventually mark his work as unique and influential.

It was in comedy that Goldoni truly excelled. In the 1730s and early 1740s he merely dabbled in theatrical poetry, while otherwise practicing law. It was only after 1748 that his career in the theater was assured. Contracted to write six spoken comedies for Venice, he simultaneously began a long and fruitful opera collaboration with the composer Baldassare Galuppi. Their first effort, *The Arcadia in Brenta* (1749), was an enormous success. In this work, which satirizes the summer retreats of the Venetian aristocracy and the affectatious behavior of cultivated society, Goldoni's elegant poetry and witty, fast-paced dialogue was ideally matched with Galuppi's comic musical pacing, his facile, tuneful melodies and lucid orchestration. Over the ensuing years, a long stream of collaborative works followed.

**Redefined Drama** It was not until 1747 that Goldoni at last found his niche as dramatist for the Teatro Sant'Angelo in Venice. It was for this theater that he made good his boast to write sixteen comedies in one year. Goldoni's gradual attempts to redefine drama inspired emphatic and widely divergent reactions. Those who preferred the old *commedia dell'arte* style were unsparing of their censure, while those who welcomed Goldoni's changes were equally lavish in their praise. Voltaire pronounced Goldoni the "painter and son of nature."

**Ended His Life in France** Goldoni left the Teatro Sant'Angelo to work for other theaters in Venice and Rome until 1762 when he journeyed to Paris to accept a position at the Comedie-Italienne where he was expected to write plays in the *commedia dell'arte* tradition. After a short while, he left the Comedie-Italienne and became the tutor of the illegitimate daughter of Louis XV of France.

Pensioned by the French king, Goldoni eventually settled in Paris, where he spent the remainder of his life writing memoirs and plays, which included the critically acclaimed *The Beneficent Bear* (1771). Unfortunately, his pension was discontinued in the wake of the French Revolution which began in 1789. The revolution saw the French monarchy removed from power, and after a bloody conflict, a republican form of government was put in its place. Following Goldoni's death in 1793, the court reversed its decision and ordered the monies reinstated and given to his widow.

### Works in Literary Context

Goldoni is most widely known as the "father of Italian comedy." From the 1730s to the 1760s, he revolutionized Italian spoken theater, purging many of the most affected, stylized traits of the *commedia dell'arte* and developing characters of more natural expression with believable and identifiable personalities.

**Realism in Drama** Goldoni has often been called the "Italian Molière," because he, like the French dramatist, drew his characters and plots from his observations of real life. Goldoni is also credited with increasing the significance of characters in his plays and decreasing the role played by the plot and plot twists. In turn, his characters have often been cited as being extremely realistic. In this, Goldoni defied the dramatic tradition of the *commedia dell'arte*, established in the sixteenth century and still dominant in Goldoni's day. The *commedia dell'arte*—almost entirely improvisational in nature, creative and spontaneous at its inception—had degenerated into a stagnant formula by the eighteenth century, relying increasingly on "lazzi," outrageous and often indecent interludes of buffoonery. In *The Beneficent Bear*, for example, Goldoni deals with the superficial aspects of humanity in an imaginative, spontaneous way. He is gen-

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Goldoni's famous contemporaries include:

**Benjamin Franklin** (1706–1790): One of the founding fathers of the United States of America, Franklin had many talents, including those of a politician, a scientist, an inventor, and a writer.

**Thomas Paine** (1737–1809): The English political writer who influenced both the American and French revolutions through such pieces as "Common Sense" (1776).

**Stanislaw Konarski** (1700–1773): A Polish author whose work inspired the Polish Enlightenment. His writings include *Effective Way of Debating* (1760–1763).

**David Hume** (1711–1776): This Scottish philosopher wrote about theories of knowledge and is known as an important empiricist—a philosopher who holds that knowledge is based on experience. He wrote *Essays Moral and Political* (1744).

**Marie Antoinette** (1755–1793): Queen of France and wife of Louis XVI, she was executed by guillotine during the French Revolution.

**Denis Diderot** (1713–1784): The French philosopher and encyclopedist whose many fields of study included the subject of free will and the conventions that defined the novels of his time. His works include *Rameau's Nephew* (c. 1761).

ial and more kindly in his judgments, and, while lacking none of Molière's keenness of observation, is devoid of his bitter satire.

### Works in Critical Context

Goldoni's role as a reformer of the Italian stage is a significant one. He was the first dramatist in Italy to provide an alternative to the standardized roles and stale scenarios of the *commedia dell'arte*. He has never been called a literary genius, but his innovations broke new dramatic ground and made possible the development of naturalism in Italian drama. Though his works are often conventionally structured around trivial incidents and employ morally traditional characters who speak plain language, it is his humor that, critics contend, never fails to delight and spark his audiences.

**Goldoni's Comedies** The author of more than 250 works, Goldoni wrote in a variety of dramatic genres—comedy, tragedy, melodrama, and opera bouffe—but his comedies are universally acknowledged to be his most important contribution to Italian literature. Commentators often claim that Goldoni's greatest attribute as a comic dramatist was his engaging naturalism. They have



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Goldoni is lauded for his realism. Here are some more works considered prime examples of literary realism:

*Middlemarch* (1871–1872), a novel by George Eliot. This novel by Eliot (the pen name of Mary Ann Evans) is considered a landmark work of realism in English language literature. It focuses on the details of everyday people in 1830s England.

*Madame Bovary* (1857), a novel by Gustave Flaubert. French writers are credited with originating the realism movement, and Flaubert was chief among French realists. *Madame Bovary* centers on the adulterous affair of a bored provincial doctor's wife.

*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), a novel by Mark Twain. Considered one of the greatest American novels ever written, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is also a masterwork of American realism.

preferred those comedies that portray worlds similar to Goldoni's own, in which the characters speak the Venetian dialect and represent members of the Italian middle class. The comedies, in particular, also display the inventiveness that critics have characterized as ingenious and intuitive, though Goldoni's naturalism is faulted for being unenlightening, as it operates like a photographic rather than an interpretational device.

Goldoni's realistic depiction of families was specifically praised by critics. Joseph Spencer Kennard wrote in his book *Goldoni and the Venice of His Time*, "The distinctive quality of Goldoni's work, the trait that sets him entirely apart from every other modern playwright, is his insight into painting family groups. Compared with even the greatest, Goldoni better understood the psychology of the family, more subtly investigated the bonds that unite the members of a household and give it the unity of a living organism."

### Responses to Literature

1. Read *The Good Wife* (1749). In what ways would you say this play is "realistic"? In your written response, cite specific examples.
2. Watch a few action and horror films. Then, read a couple of Goldoni's plays. Action and horror films are generally plot driven, while Goldoni's plays are often described as being more concerned with character than with plot. Based on the films you watched and the plays you read, what would you say is the difference between plot-driven literature and film and character-driven literature and film? Write a

paper in which you share your findings. Support your response with examples from the films and plays you examined.

3. Goldoni's work is considered realistic in its representation of its characters. In order to practice your ability at accurately representing the lives of those around you, write a short paragraph describing in appearance a person or animal you love. Try to choose those aspects of the person or animal that you think represent the personality of the described. For instance, maybe your dog is a bumbling, blundering, sloppy animal, so you might describe in greater detail your dog's long, slimy, textured tongue.
4. Goldoni has been quoted as saying, "The world is a beautiful book, but of little use to him who cannot read it." What do you think Goldoni meant by this? How do you think one learns to "read" the world? Consider these questions while responding to the Goldoni quote in a short essay in which you engage with the idea it expresses.

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## Oliver Goldsmith

BORN: 1728, Ballymahon, Longford, Ireland

DIED: 1774, London, England

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

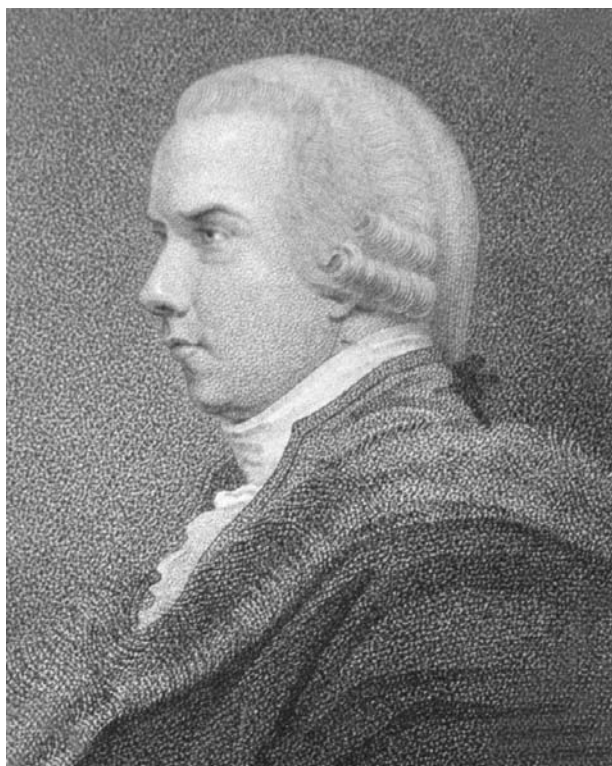
*The Citizen of the World* (1762)

*The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766)

*The Good-Natur'd Man* (1768)

*The Deserted Village* (1770)

*She Stoops to Conquer* (1771)



Oliver Goldsmith Goldsmith, Oliver, photograph. The Library of Congress.

## Overview

Oliver Goldsmith was one of the most important writers of the Augustan Age, otherwise known as the neoclassical age or the Age of Reason. The most striking feature of Goldsmith's writing is his versatility; he wrote across genres, including the essay, the pseudoletter, the novel, poetry, history, and biography.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***Growing Up the Son of a Poor Clergyman*** Goldsmith was the fifth child born to the Reverend Charles Goldsmith and his wife. During his youth, his family was poor, but not in serious financial straits. His parents had planned for a university education for their son, but his older sister's marriage necessitated a large dowry and left no money for tuition. As a result, Goldsmith entered Dublin's Trinity College in 1745 as a sizar. The sizar system enabled indigent students to attend college for a nominal fee in exchange for maintenance work on school property. They were often pressed into more menial labor, however, and were generally scorned by wealthier students.

***A Neglectful Student*** Goldsmith attended school during an exciting time in the intellectual history of the Western world. Known as the Enlightenment, the eight-

eenth century was one of optimism and progress that coincided with the advent of the Industrial Revolution. Biographers theorize that Goldsmith had looked forward to college as an opportunity to distinguish himself. However, profoundly disappointed with the uncongeniality of his situation at Trinity, Goldsmith neglected his studies and was frequently reprimanded for infractions of college regulations. The most serious of these was his participation in a riot that grew out of a protest of another student's arrest and ended with the death of several people. Although he left college briefly, he eventually returned and earned a bachelor of arts degree in 1749.

***Interviewing in Tight Red Trousers*** Goldsmith spent the next several years idly. Casting about for a profession, he prepared halfheartedly to become ordained for leadership in the Church, but reportedly was rejected as a candidate after appearing for an interview with a bishop wearing tight red trousers. He also studied medicine for a short time in Edinburgh, Scotland, before embarking on a walking tour of the European continent in 1753; his wanderings provided the inspiration for several later works, including *The Traveller* and the adventures of George Primrose in *The Vicar of Wakefield*. After three years of travel, he arrived in London early in 1756, penniless and without an acquaintance in the city.

***Introduction to Magazine Writing*** During the next several years, he held a variety of poorly paying jobs. However, an important opportunity was provided by Ralph Griffiths, the publisher and owner of the *Monthly Review*, who commissioned book reviews for his publication from Goldsmith. This arrangement introduced Goldsmith to professional magazine writing, a vocation that would eventually provide most of his income.

***Proofreading, Theater Reviews, and Essay Contributions*** After his association with Griffiths ended, he obtained a proofreading job with the novelist and printer Samuel Richardson and continued to contribute essays as well as book and theater reviews to a number of journals. From October through November of 1759, Goldsmith wrote the entire contents of a new magazine, *The Bee*, commissioned by the bookseller John Wilkes (or Wilkie). Goldsmith furnished *The Bee* with miscellaneous essays, short pieces of fiction, and book and play reviews for its eight-issue run. One such essay by Goldsmith praising the works of Samuel Johnson and Tobias Smollett came to Smollett's attention, and he invited Goldsmith to contribute to his *Critical Review* and to a forthcoming publication, the *British Magazine*; another magazine publisher, John Newbery, also solicited contributions to his *Publick Ledger*. Goldsmith's first book, *An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe*, appeared in 1759. This long essay on European culture and literature was published anonymously; however, members of London's literary scene were easily able

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Goldsmith's famous contemporaries include:

**Samuel Johnson** (1709–1784): Like Goldsmith, Johnson was a well-known English literary figure who wrote in a variety of genres. As an essayist, a poet, a biographer, and a critic, he is cited as the most quoted English writer after William Shakespeare.

**Jean-Jacques Rousseau** (1712–1778): Rousseau was a French Enlightenment philosopher who influenced the French Revolution and the development of romanticism.

**Sarah Fielding** (1710–1768): Fielding was a British author who wrote the first children's novel in English.

**James Cook** (1728–1779): Cook was a British explorer and cartographer who made three important voyages of discovery to the Pacific Ocean.

**David Hume** (1711–1776): Hume was an eighteenth-century philosopher and historian known for his naturalistic philosophy, which united humanity with divinity and advocated trust in human reason.

**Denis Diderot** (1713–1784): Diderot was a French philosopher during the eighteenth century who challenged conventional morality, attacked the French government, and promoted the ideals of the Enlightenment.

**George William Frederick** (1738–1820): Known as George III, he was king of Great Britain from 1760 until his death.

to learn the writer's identity, and Goldsmith's reputation as an author began to grow.

In the *Publick Ledger* in 1760, Goldsmith began his most famous series of periodical essays, the "Chinese Letters." Purporting to be a succession of letters from a Chinese philosopher visiting London, the essays—often humorous and witty, sometimes introspective and philosophical—provided thinly veiled social satire on the customs, manners, and morals of Londoners for more than a year and a half. The ninety-eight "Letters," with four additional essays, were published in 1762 as *The Citizen of the World; or, Letters from a Chinese Philosopher Residing in London to His Friends in the East*, the first book to appear under Goldsmith's name. He was becoming increasingly prominent in London literary society, a position that was reinforced through his association with a coterie of well-known intellectuals led by Samuel Johnson who called themselves The Club (later the Literary Club), a group that included the painter Sir Joshua Reynolds, writers James Boswell, Edmund Burke, and Thomas Percy, and actor and theater manager David Garrick.

**Anonymous Literary Hackwork** The success of *The Citizen of the World* assured Goldsmith a readership that welcomed his subsequent works, but his own finan-

cial improvidence required that he spend much of his time at anonymous literary hackwork. Periodical essays, translations, and popularized versions of existing works could be quickly written and sold, providing him a precarious hand-to-mouth existence. Boswell's account of the sale of *The Vicar of Wakefield* indicates that Goldsmith's masterpieces were often hastily sold to the first publisher who offered any cash advance. Throughout the remainder of his literary career in London, his life followed a pattern of ever-mounting debts, paid with the income from his hack writing, with occasional intervals spent on the few but notable literary works on which his reputation rests.

### *Moving Characterizations Offered After Death*

Goldsmith died at the Temple on April 4, 1774. His death, probably caused by a kidney infection resulting from a stone in the bladder, was hastened by his prescribing for himself, against medical advice, huge doses of Dr. James's Fever Powders. His death occasioned widespread grief. "Epigrams, epitaphs and monodies to his memory were without end," wrote Sir Joshua Reynolds in his character sketch. "Let not his frailties be remembered," Samuel Johnson declared, "he was a very great man." But of course his frailties were remembered. Even before his death the *Westminster Magazine* of March 1773 had issued "Humorous Anecdotes of Dr. Goldsmith," a prelude to many later characterizations of him as an eccentric. In his own posthumously published *Retaliation* (1774), a brilliant series of epitaphs on his friends, Goldsmith described himself as "Magnanimous Goldsmith, a Gooseberry Fool." Reynolds's prose portrait, recovered among the Boswell papers and published in 1952, is a moving characterization of his friend, but it consolidates rather than corrects the picture of him as a social buffoon. As David Garrick put it in the epigram that inspired Goldsmith to write *Retaliation*, he "wrote like an angel but talked like poor Poll."

### Works in Literary Context

In a brief but intensely creative period of sixteen years, Goldsmith distinguished himself in a broad variety of literary forms, writing essays, biographies, histories, poems, plays, and a novel. In all he wrote he achieved a style of remarkable ease and charm. Goldsmith's most important literary works were in many respects inspired by his dislike of contemporary literary sensibilities. Indeed, he may have learned something from the manner of man of letters Joseph Addison and Irish writer and politician Richard Steele, but he despised and strongly condemned the Whig ideology and sentimentality that figure so largely in their works.

**The Value of Sentimental Comedy** In the eighteenth century, English literature had turned increasingly toward sentimentalism as a reaction against what was perceived to be the immorality of Restoration-period literature. In the service of the sentimental ideal, authors composed morally instructive works based on the premise

that human nature was essentially good and that human-kind was potentially perfectible. In drama, this trend took the form of the sentimental comedy—so termed because of formulaic and often implausible happy endings. The didactic purpose of a sentimental work often superseded such purely artistic elements as characterization or plot. In his critical works, Goldsmith had noted and deplored the absence of humor in contemporary sentimental literature, especially in drama. Goldsmith expressed his preference for the “laughing” over the sentimental comedy, and a widespread modern critical assumption is that he intended his own light and humorous plays to stand as a corrective to the popular sentimental comedies.

**Goldsmith's Moral Bent** Running throughout all Goldsmith's writing is a strong moral strain, attacking cruelty and injustice, while allowing amply for flawed humanity's frailties and errors. Like Fielding, who heavily influenced his writing, Goldsmith strongly attacked perversions of the law that served selfish, powerful interests. His conservative social and political ideas, formed as he grew up in Ireland, ally him with the Augustan humanists such as Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope, as well as Johnson, with whom he also shared a largely rhetorical conception of literature, far more than with any of those whose ideas would coalesce into Romanticism. He strongly and consistently attacked the emerging sentimental ethos, just as his rural settings always show man as nature's steward, following the Christian humanist position. When Goldsmith satirizes human folly, he does so in a comic spirit; to use John Dryden's broad classifications, Goldsmith's approach is Horatian, or intimate and reflective, rather than satirical and Juvenalian like Swift's or Pope's, though his social and political ideas are close to theirs.

## Works in Critical Context

**A First-Rank Historian** In an assessment of his importance as a writer, one returns inevitably to the charm of his style and the sheer breadth of his work across genres. In 1773, Johnson said: “Whether, indeed, we take him as a poet—as a comick writer—or as an historian, he stands in the first rank.” He held strong moral convictions, and though tolerant of human weaknesses, he was critical of injustice and cruelty, especially as these were aspects of prisons and the penal laws. The stylistic combination of utility and delight in his work puts him closer, perhaps, to his Augustan predecessors than to the Romantics who followed him, though his sentiment and rural subjects give some justification to the label “pre-Romantic,” with which literary historians used to describe him. His social satire is amiable in the tradition of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele rather than harsh in the manner of Pope and Swift. The authors of the *Spectator* papers were a clear influence on his essays and his novel, but politically his values are closer to those of Pope and the “Tory” tradition, especially in his defense of a traditional moral economy against commercial encroachments.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Goldsmith's works relied on a comic spirit to satirize human folly. Here are some other works with a similar approach:

*The Misanthrope* (1666), a play by Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (a.k.a. Molière). This play points out the flaws all humans possess while directly satirizing the hypocrisies of the French aristocracy.

*Anti-Matrimony* (1910), a play by Percy MacKaye Wycherley. This play satirizes some of the moral folly and intellectual pretensions of the early twentieth century.

*27 Heaven* (2007), a play by Ian Halperin and author Todd Shapiro. This play is a rock musical that satirizes contemporary popular culture by depicting conversations among four rock icons who died at age 27.

**Reduction in Readership** His overall reputation was higher in the nineteenth century, when Thackeray dubbed him “the most beloved of writers,” than it is today. His histories, standard works until well into the Victorian period, are hardly read now. But *She Stoops to Conquer* still plays to amused audiences, and *The Deserted Village* retains its appeal even if its readership is reduced. Perhaps Goldsmith's prose fiction carries most interest to modern readers. As a work comprised by a series of letters, *The Citizen of the World* is of much interest to critics of narrative. Additionally, as a novel that explores with some profundity a number of social, moral, and religious questions, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, as it is read today, is no longer the sentimental idyll it seemed to some former readers.

**Enduring Popularity of *The Vicar of Wakefield*** Unable to reconcile their varied interpretations of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, readers have been interested in the work for more than two hundred years, and it has become a standard text in the study of the English novel. Similarly, although literary commentators continue to debate Goldsmith's intent in writing *She Stoops to Conquer; or The Mistakes of a Night: A Comedy*, audiences unconcerned with possible shades of authorial intent continue to enjoy the play as an entertaining theatrical comedy. While some modern critics reexamine Goldsmith's life in an attempt to create an accurate portrait free of the sentimentalizing of earlier biographical efforts, far more readers and critics concur with Ricardo Quintana, who stated: “It is time that we concerned ourselves less with his ugly face, his awkward social presence, and more with the actual nature of his achievement as a writer.”

## Responses to Literature

1. Goldsmith distinguished himself in a broad variety of literary forms. Make a list of other authors who have

successfully written across genres. Then, choose one of those authors and read a short selection from a few of their works. Write a paragraph explaining whether or not you think the author uses the same tone or voice in each of these works. Use examples from the text to support your opinions.

2. Commentators often disagree about whether Goldsmith's apparent sentimentality is meant to be taken seriously or is meant to be a satirical attack. With one of your classmates, discuss how both of these interpretations can coexist. Then shift the discussion to explore how only one interpretation can be accepted. Afterward, together with your classmate, write a paragraph answering the following question: Should readers attempt to consider which interpretation Goldsmith intended, or is it up to readers to decide for themselves which makes the most sense to them?
3. In *The Vicar of Wakefield*, the reader is told no more than the vicar himself knows, which is much less than the entire story. Write an essay filling out what an omniscient, third-person narrator might have added to the story.
4. Much of Goldsmith's writing was inspired by a dislike of the literary sensibilities of his day. Make a list of present-day literary sensibilities that you dislike and explain the reasons for each of your choices.

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## Witold Gombrowicz

BORN: 1904, Warsaw, Poland

DIED: 1969, Venice, France

NATIONALITY: Polish

GENRE: Fiction, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Ferdydurke* (1938)

*Trans-Atlantic* (1953)

*Ivona, Princess of Burgundia*  
(1957)

*The Marriage* (1963)

*Cosmos* (1965)

### Overview

Witold Gombrowicz has been widely recognized as an important figure in twentieth-century Polish literature and is one of the most original and influential of European novelists, playwrights, and essayists of his time. His works, despite the extraordinary degree of technical difficulty involved in the process of their translation, have been rendered into all major languages and published or staged worldwide.



Witold Gombrowicz. Gombrowicz, Witold, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.



## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Privileged Beginnings** Gombrowicz was born on August 4, 1904, to proprietor and industrialist Jan Onufry Gombrowicz and Antonina née Kotkowski, in his parents' country manor located in the village of Maloszyce in what once was and would be again central Poland. (While Poland had existed as a country, it had been physically divided by the Austrian, Prussian, and Russian empires in 1795. Poles retained their cultural unity despite lack of a political entity.) The youngest of four children, Gombrowicz was usually the most rebellious and undisciplined of them. His early years in the rural provinces, with their time-honored rituals of country life and social hierarchy, offered him much to rebel against. He would later exaggerate his family's pretenses and snobbery in his prose.

**Studied Law in Warsaw** In 1911, his family moved to Warsaw, where Gombrowicz was to receive his education. While he attended high school, Poland saw much of its traditional territory restored and received its full independence at the end of World War I, an international conflict that saw 30 million casualties. After graduating from high school, he reluctantly gave in to his father's wish and in 1922 began to study law at Warsaw University. He earned his degree in 1927 and left for France, where he spent a year mostly continuing his studies at the Institut des Hautes Études Internationales. Upon returning to Poland, he worked for a while as a legal apprentice in Warsaw courts, but he never applied himself seriously enough to really pursue a career as a lawyer. Instead, he began to devote himself entirely to writing.

**Literary Debut** In 1933, Gombrowicz made his literary debut by publishing a collection of short stories under the deliberately odd title *Memoirs Written in Puberty*. Though this first work was considered somewhat immature, by the mid 1930s he was enjoying moderate fame as a colorful personality and fascinating interlocutor as well as an insightful literary critic. He even had his "own" table in the exclusive literary café Ziemiańska. It was, however, his first novel, *Ferdydurke*, that became a genuine event in Polish literary life. Published in 1938, it instantly prompted attacks by both extreme right- and extreme left-wing critics who often engaged in heated critical debates about avant-garde tendencies in modern Polish fiction.

**Polish Literary Career Interrupted by World War II** Before World War II, Gombrowicz also published his first play, *Iyona, Princess of Burgundia* (1938) in the leading literary monthly, *Skamander*. The outbreak of war on September 1, 1939, interrupted a serialized publication in a Warsaw tabloid of his parody of a Gothic

romance, *Possessed*, which was never resumed. On that day, Nazi Germany invaded Poland. Germany, led by Adolf Hitler, had territorial ambitions and had already been allowed to take over parts of Czechoslovakia. Germany's invasion of Poland compelled Great Britain and France to declare war on Germany, thus officially beginning World War II.

As the last installments of *Possessed* were being printed, however, Gombrowicz was already in Buenos Aires. Only a few weeks before the German invasion of Poland, he had boarded the transatlantic liner *Boleslaw Chrobry* as a participant on a trip to Argentina of a small group of young Polish literati, sponsored by the shipping company Gdynia-American Lines. While in Buenos Aires, he learned about the outbreak of war and, being unfit for military service anyway, decided not to return. Gombrowicz did not foresee that the capital of Argentina would remain his home for the next quarter of a century.

At the time of his arrival, Argentina was ruled by a conservative oligarchy backed by the military, which was officially neutral but unofficially sympathetic to the Axis Powers led by Germany. After a regime change in 1943, Argentina was even more friendly to the Axis group. When Juan Domingo Perón was elected president of Argentina in 1946, he reportedly allowed a number of Nazi German leaders to hide in Argentina after the war.

**Life in Buenos Aires** Gombrowicz's first Argentinian years satisfied his need for solitary independence devoid of any ties or obligations. But they were also extremely difficult in terms of financial insecurity. Initially, the only source of income available to him was the articles he published sporadically in the local press. To make ends meet, he had to accept whatever job was available. Thus, in 1943 and 1944 he worked at the archive of the periodical *Jezuitor Solidaridad*, and in 1947, he took a seemingly better but in fact equally poorly paid job as a secretary in a Polish bank, Banco Polaco, in Buenos Aires.

**Challenged Literary Efforts** At the same time, Gombrowicz continued his writing with great determination and made numerous friends in Argentinian literary circles. Most of these friends were younger writers, some of whom eventually helped him translate his works into Spanish. During the 1940s, he was more likely to find some spiritual support among those Argentinian friends than among members of the Polish émigré community. These people remained put off, if not downright antagonized, by what they considered to be irreverent mockery and a general "lack of seriousness" in his writing.

**Greater Fame with Postwar Novels** Such charges came at Gombrowicz with increasing frequency and aggressiveness after he became more visible as a writer—thanks to his entering in 1951 into steady collaboration

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gombrowicz's famous contemporaries include:

**Josip Broz Tito** (1892–1980): Leader of the antifascist resistance in Yugoslavia during World War I, then president of Yugoslavia until his death in 1980. Though Yugoslavia was a socialist country, Tito broke off relations with the Soviet Union and founded the Non-Aligned Movement, a group of nations that considered itself aligned with neither the Soviet Union nor the United States.

**Jorge Luis Borges** (1899–1986): Native of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and writer of essays and short stories known for their complexity, intellectual brilliance, and postmodernism.

**Christopher Isherwood** (1904–1986): The English-born American novelist who was one of the first openly gay novelists to attract a wide readership. His books include *A Single Man* (1964).

**Pablo Neruda** (1904–1973): The Chilean author and Communist politician. His winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971 created quite a stir because of his political leanings. He is the author of *Twenty Poems of Love* and *a Song of Despair* (1924).

**B. F. Skinner** (1904–1990): An American psychologist who made a great impact on his field of study with his theories on operant conditioning.

with the Paris-based émigré monthly *Kultura*. The consecutive installments of his *Diary, 1953–1956* began to appear on the pages of that periodical in 1953, and it was within the book series published by *Kultura* that most of his postwar works came out in book form. Also appearing in 1953 were his second novel, *Trans-Atlantic*, and his second play, *The Marriage*. One of the frequent contributors to *Kultura*, the critic Konstanty A. Jeleński, helped Gombrowicz enormously by promoting his works in Europe and translating them into French.

***Living in West Berlin, Blacklisted in Poland*** In 1955, Gombrowicz quit his job at Banco Polaco. For a while, he tried to support himself with grants, royalties for his published and staged works, and the modest income he earned by giving private lectures on philosophy. The year 1958 marked the beginning of his serious respiratory problems, which would be the cause of his death eleven years later. In 1963, he received a grant from the Ford Foundation for a one-year stay in West Berlin, and in April of that year he left Argentina. West Berlin was technically in Communist-controlled East Germany; however, the city was divided after the end of World War II, and the western part of the city was

technically under the control of the Western Allies in the war: the United States, Great Britain, and France.

While in Berlin, Gombrowicz consented to give an interview to a Polish journalist in which he expressed sincerely his views on many touchy political subjects. Published subsequently in Poland along with a scathing commentary by his interviewer, his statements were met with a hostile campaign by the Communist media. As a result, no book by Gombrowicz was allowed to be published in Poland until his death.

***A Brief Happiness*** In May 1964, Gombrowicz moved from Germany to France. During his stay at the Royaumont Abbey as a guest of the *Circle Culturel* of the Royaumont Foundation, he met Rita Labrosse, a young Canadian specialist in Romance literature. Labrosse became his companion and, in December 1968, his wife. In the fall of 1964 the couple settled in the small town of Vence in southern France.

The last years of Gombrowicz's life were marked by his rapidly growing international fame but deteriorating health. He published his last novel, *Cosmos* in 1965. Gombrowicz died July 24, 1969, in Vence after a long illness.

In the 1970s, the Communist authorities—who had taken charge of Poland after World War II as the Soviet Union was in control of Eastern Europe, forming the so-called Iron Curtain—were ready to relent and lift the publishing ban, but the writer's last will thwarted their designs to publish severely abridged editions. In his will, Gombrowicz stated that his work could be published in Poland only in its entirety—that is, without censorship cuts. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Gombrowicz's books were read widely in Poland, but thanks only to the clandestine circulation of their émigré editions and underground reprints.

### Works in Literary Context

While living in Poland, Argentina, West Berlin, and France, Gombrowicz came into contact with many intellectual and literary ideas. He was profoundly influenced by philosophical ideas and was an early proponent of existentialism. While themes of human interdependence can be found in both his novels and plays, his dramas are regarded as part of the Theater of the Absurd. The Theater of the Absurd was popular during the 1950s and 1960s, had its origins in France, and explored the idea that the human condition is essentially meaningless.

***The Influence of Philosophy*** Philosophy—especially existential philosophy—had a profound impact on Gombrowicz's work. In *A Guide to Philosophy in Six Hours and Fifteen Minutes* (1995), he states, “Philosophy is needed for a global view of culture. It is important for writers.” Before he had read Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, his own writing anticipated the existentialist movement—which is primarily concerned with human essence, being, or identity and human will and choice.

After Gombrowicz read the French philosopher's work, he highlighted Sartre's statement: "Consciousness is, so to speak, outside of me." In response, he said, "When I read that in *Being and Nothingness*, I shouted with enthusiasm, since it is precisely the notion of man which creates form and which cannot really be authentic." It was this notion of the self, in conflict with a society that makes expectations, that provided the theme for much of his work.

**Themes of Human Interdependence** A central concern in Gombrowicz's prose is also the interdependence of human beings, or what he termed the "interhuman church." This philosophy reflects his belief that man has no essence of his own; his identity depends upon and is determined by the society around him and on their actions and reactions.

Most of Gombrowicz's plays explore concerns similar to those of his prose works. In *Ivona, Princess of Burgundia* (1957), for example, the fiancée of a prince provokes chaos in a fairytale kingdom when her shyness and lack of social graces prohibit her from responding in the expected manner to members of the royal court.

**Dual Plots in the Theater of the Absurd** Gombrowicz's dramas are usually associated with the Theater of the Absurd because of their black humor, bizarre situations, nonsensical dialogue, and disjointed structure. Accordingly, two basic models of fictional plot coexist in his works. In the model of an investigation, reality appears to the narrator/protagonist as a problem to solve. In the model of stage-setting, the narrator/protagonist becomes an active manipulator of reality.

## Works in Critical Context

Gombrowicz's writing has met with an extremely wide range of criticism. Nevertheless, from his first work, Gombrowicz quickly won recognition in the circles of younger writers. His collection of short stories, *Memoirs Written in Puberty* (1933), garnered critical reaction that was rather discouraging, while his three-volume *Diary* (1957), has been hailed by many critics as the single most important Polish book of nonfiction in the twentieth century. Gombrowicz's sense of the absurd fared much better, for his readers in Poland, where the publication between 1957 and 1958 of *Ferdydurke*, *Ivona*, *Trans-Atlantic*, *The Marriage*, and *Bakakaj* turned him into a cultural idol of many young critics and readers.

**Possessed** While the history of Gombrowicz's *Possessed* was intertwined with the start of World War II, the novel is regarded as a transitional work by critics. Blake Morrison of the London newspaper the *Observer* notes, "Witold Gombrowicz's *Possessed* is [an] overt piece of harking back." While Morrison regards it as exemplary of the Gothic genre, he also comments that Gombrowicz begins to adapt the Gothic trappings to his own ends." Michael Irwin of the *Times Literary Supplement* also

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In nature there is an interdependence of all living things. In Gombrowicz's work there is a focus on the interdependence of human beings as they interact and get caught up in each other's lives. Here are a few works by writers who have a similar emphasis:

*Hamlet* (1599–1601), a play by William Shakespeare. In this ultimate tragedy, the profound influence of the characters on each other's sanity is immeasurable.

*Hedda Gabler* (1890), a play by Henrik Ibsen. In this nineteenth-century drama, Gabler gets entangled with the business of others and manipulates those around her to the point where she causes her own demise.

*No Exit* (1944), a play by Jean-Paul Sartre. In this existential drama, the classic Sartrean philosophy is uttered in the line, "Hell is other people."

*A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), a play by Tennessee Williams. In this critically acclaimed drama, an aging southern belle and her working-class brother-in-law get entangled until one is driven to the brink of madness.

states that it is more than just a stereotypical Gothic novel, but believed it "is impossible to see *Possessed* as a 'serious' work. One or two themes, one or two formulations . . . are characteristic of the author's work, but only in a trivial way." Yet Ewa Thompson of *World Literature Today* praises the early novel. She writes, "*Possessed* is worth reading on two counts: as a fast-paced mystery story, and as an example of the importance of contexts."

## Responses to Literature

1. Students interested in the connection between the administration of Argentina's Juan Perón and the former leaders of the Third Reich will be interested in reading *The Real Odessa: Smuggling the Nazis to Perón's Argentina* (2003) by Uki Goñi.
2. Given the theme of Gombrowicz's "interhuman church," conduct a brief debate with peers. One side will argue the pros of interdependence and one side will argue the cons. The group may decide to argue a specific relationship, such as a family, or to argue a global relationship, such as two countries dependent upon each other.
3. Gombrowicz's novel *Ferdydurke* features a protagonist who undergoes an unexplainable physical transformation. In this respect, the novel is similar to other modernist masterworks such as Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis" and Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*. After reading *Ferdydurke*, write a paper comparing the transformation in that novel to the

transformations in “Metamorphosis” and *Rhinoceros*. What points are the authors able to make by giving their characters unstable identities? What new perspectives are they able to achieve?

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## ❏ Nadine Gordimer

BORN: 1923, Springs, South Africa

NATIONALITY: South African

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*A Guest of Honour* (1970)

*The Conservationist* (1974)

*July's People* (1981)

*Jump, and Other Stories* (1991)

*The House Gun* (1998)



Nadine Gordimer Gordimer, Nadine, photograph. AP Images.

### Overview

Throughout her career, South African writer and Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer has detailed the corrosive effects of life in the racially segregated state. Gordimer has steered a difficult middle path between the conflicting claims of conservative white readers who resented her relentless analyses of white privilege, and those of other readers—both white and black, and often committed to social change—who regarded as trivial or indulgent her insistence that art should not become propaganda.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Privileged Upbringing in Segregated South Africa** Nadine Gordimer, the daughter of Jewish immigrants, was born in Springs, a mining town forty miles outside Johannesburg, in Transvaal, South Africa, on November 20, 1923. A shop-owning family, the Gordimers were part of the white, English-speaking middle class.

Gordimer attended a local Catholic school until the age of eleven. Because of a heart ailment, she was educated privately at home from her eleventh to her sixteenth year. Gordimer began writing in earnest in her teens as a response to the racial divisions she observed. Her early short stories illustrate both Gordimer's sharp

eye for detail and her indirect, ironic manner of commenting on the injustices resulting from racial separation. Three of her best-known stories illustrating this theme were published in 1947, before the victory of the National Party—which systematized white dominance and enforced racial separation in the practice known as “apartheid,” or “apartness.”

Gordimer married Gerald Gavron in 1949; the two divorced in 1952. In 1954 Gordimer married Reinhold Cassirer, a German Jewish refugee from the Nazi regime who had a distinguished career with British Intelligence during World War II.

***The Apartheid Era*** Gordimer’s early work focuses on the intrusion of external reality into the comfortable existence of South Africa’s middle-class white society. *The Lying Days* (1953) portrays a sheltered Afrikaner woman who gains political consciousness through her affair with a social worker. Despite autobiographical elements, this novel shows Gordimer’s gift for creating individual truths that reflect more general, public truths.

*A World of Strangers* was published in 1958 at the height of the liberal movement in South Africa, during which time intellectuals and artists of all colors strove to resist the increasingly restrictive codes of official apartheid. The novel, banned by the South African government, relates a British writer’s attempts to unite his white intellectual companions with several black Africans whom he has recently befriended.

The liberalism of the 1950s ended violently with the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, when white police shot down sixty-nine blacks protesting laws that forbade non-whites from traveling freely in South Africa. The violence resulted in the declaration of a state of emergency and the subsequent arrest and detention without trial of many political figures. From that point, a police state was established, which silenced organized political opposition and drove into exile many black intellectuals.

***The Limits of White Liberalism*** In her early work Gordimer depicts the ambiguity and compromises of white liberalism; in her writing published between 1960 and 1994 she analyzes its failure to produce any meaningful political changes in South Africa. The novella *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966), for example, reconstructs events leading to the suicide of a white political activist who had betrayed his compatriots in exchange for leniency. *A Guest of Honour* (1970) is also the story of white liberal disillusionment.

The apartheid regime appeared to be permanently established in 1974 when *The Conservationist* appeared. It focuses on a wealthy white industrialist’s struggle to come to terms with his guilt and sense of displacement as he grows increasingly threatened by the presence of poor black squatters on his estate. The novel marked an important departure for Gordimer: it was the first of her books

to hint positively at an ultimate return of South Africa to black majority control.

*Burger’s Daughter*, banned briefly on publication in 1979, details the efforts of Rosa Burger, the daughter of a martyred leader of the South African Communist Party, to pursue an apolitical existence. Gordimer put further pressure on the idea that white liberalism in itself was of any use in South Africa with *July’s People* (1981). The book centers on a liberal white family forced to depend on the providence of a black man who was previously their servant. Through this reversal of roles, the novel reveals deep-rooted feelings of prejudice and racial supremacy in even the most open-minded individuals.

Gordimer felt deeply the need for South African white minority to become active in the cause of justice. She joined the African National Congress (ANC) while it was still an illegal organization because she felt it represented the best hope for the country. She even harbored ANC leaders in her home to protect them from government persecution. In 1986, Gordimer testified on behalf of nearly two dozen antiapartheid activists on trial for treason. She spoke out openly and often against apartheid, and participated in antiapartheid demonstrations within South Africa.

***Post-Apartheid Work*** Antiapartheid activist Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1990. Gordimer won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1991. In 1994 the ANC won the first democratic election in the country. As apartheid ended and South African blacks were granted political power, critics scanned Gordimer’s fiction to see how her focus would change. Her novel *None to Accompany Me* (1994) looks at the fortunes of two families—one black, one white—as they move into the post-apartheid era. She examines the problems of those negotiating the change and returning from exile or underground.

Gordimer’s *The House Gun* (1998) is set in the new South Africa. The new regime, unquestionably in power, is nevertheless beset with the chronic problem of random violence and crime in a society casting off a recognition of civil authority together with the authoritarian trappings of the former era. Gordimer’s interest in *The House Gun* is not so much on the present but on the legacy of the past and how that past has produced the violent contemporary climate.

Recently, Gordimer has turned her attention to another scourge in South African society: the spread of HIV/AIDS. She has been an active fund-raiser for AIDS treatment in South Africa. Gordimer continues to live and write in South Africa.

## Works in Literary Context

Gordimer was originally only one of a series of novelists working in South Africa after World War II. “Some of the writers, like [Alan] Paton, turned to nonfiction or



## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gordimer's famous contemporaries include:

**Naguib Mahfouz** (1911–2006): Egyptian novelist, screenwriter, and playwright who explored existentialism and modernized Arabic literature; awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988.

**Nelson Mandela** (1918–): Former president of South Africa and 1993 recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize; under apartheid, he spent twenty-seven years as a political prisoner.

**Chinua Achebe** (1930–): Nigerian novelist, poet, and critic who incorporates oral Igbo traditions into his work.

**J. M. Coetzee** (1940–): South African novelist, essayist, and translator; awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2003.

**Aung San Suu Kyi** (1945–): elected prime minister of Burma (Myanmar) in 1990 but placed under house arrest by the ruling military; awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.

political work; even more, most notably [Peter] Abrahams and Dan Jacobson, expatriated,” explains John Cooke in *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: Private Lives/Public Landscapes*. “By the early sixties Gordimer was almost the only member of the postwar group to continue producing fiction from within the country. That she should be the survivor was not altogether surprising, for she was in essential ways more a product of South Africa than her contemporaries. She attended university at home, not in England as colonial writers so regularly have; she did not travel abroad until she was thirty.”

### *The Tradition of South African Literature*

Before Gordimer, the most famous white South African novelist of English language literature: Alan Paton, author of the 1948 best seller *Cry, the Beloved Country*, a moving protest novel about race relations in South Africa. Before Paton, however, white South African Olive Schreiner gained some short-term attention for her *The Story of an African Farm* (1883). Schreiner's work fell into obscurity for decades until it was recovered by critics in the 1980s. Aside from Gordimer, the white South African author of greatest prominence today is J.M. Coetzee, winner of the 2003 Nobel Prize in Literature. Coetzee, author of such works as *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), *The Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), and *Disgrace* (1999) focused much of his writing on the complicated social issues facing his racially divided country.

The white population of South Africa comes from both British and Dutch descent, and the descendants of

the early Dutch settlers speak a language called Afrikaans. Two prominent writers of Afrikaans literature include André Brink (1935–) and Breyten Breytenbach (1939–) Both were active opponents to the apartheid regime; Breytenbach spent seven years in prison in South Africa for treason as a result of his activities, an experience recounted in his English-language work *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (1983). Writer Athol Fugard, though of Afrikaner descent, writes in English to reach a wider audience. The author of numerous plays and novels, his most famous works include *Blood Knot* (1962) and *Master Harold . . . and the Boys* (1982).

Black South African writers of the apartheid era faced imprisonment for open criticism of the government, which obviously dampened output by members of those generations, and many fled the country. Peter Abrahams, for example, left South Africa at the age of twenty in 1939. His novel *Mine Boy* (1946) brought him to critical attention. Alex La Guma stayed in South Africa for much of his adult life, writing such protest novels as 1962's *A Walk in the Night* before leaving the country for good in 1966. Since the end of apartheid, South Africa has experienced a small renaissance in literature by black South Africans.

**White Minority Voice** Much of Gordimer's fiction focuses upon white middle-class lives. It frequently depicts what Maxwell Geismar describes as “a terrified white consciousness in the midst of a mysterious and ominous sea of black humanity.” But the enduring subject of her writing has been “the consequences of apartheid on the daily lives of men and women, the distortions it produces in relationships among both blacks and whites,” says critic Michiko Kakutani. Much criticism of Gordimer has focused on her position as a white writer in a predominantly black African country. Many have questioned her ability to fully understand the reality of black South African life, or even her moral right to “speak” for black Africans. Christopher Heywood defends Gordimer's vision, seeing her as part of the Western tradition: “The adoption of a point of view approximating to that of the submerged majority in southern Africa calls for no superhuman effort, since there is abundant evidence and experience, and a tradition of writing stemming from the American writer W.E.B. DuBois, and from the English writers such as E.D. Morel and D.H. Lawrence, upon which it can be based.” He notes that her white status allows solutions that affect South Africans differently, depending on their race: “Gordimer's view [is] that the colour-bar . . . can be best repudiated and destroyed from within . . .”

Other critics have argued that Gordimer successfully aligned herself politically with other first-class “third-world” writers such as Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz, Nigerian Chinua Achebe, and Israeli Amos Oz. “Her attention is turned on writers whose work seems most engaged in the questions that have absorbed her for much of her

life,” critic Diana Jean Schemo writes, “how justice, wealth, power and freedom are parceled out in a society, and the repercussions for its people.” “For the past 40 years,” Anne Whitehouse writes, “Gordimer’s fiction has reflected and illuminated her country’s troubled history and the passions of individuals with integrity and detachment. *None to Accompany Me* is a sustaining achievement, proving Gordimer once again a lucid witness to her country’s transformation and a formidable interpreter of the inner self.”

### Works in Critical Context

Declared “the literary voice and conscience of her society” by Maxwell Geismar, Gordimer has been praised for her incisive examination of complex human tensions generated by apartheid.

According to scholars like John Cooke and Stephen Clingman, Gordimer’s fiction tells of vast social change through the everyday experiences of individuals. Her fiction abounds with the most closely observed detail, and most critics agree that her insights have been as finely perceptive as her observations.

The volatile racial tensions in South Africa have affected the reception of Gordimer’s literature throughout her career. Many critics have attempted to categorize Gordimer as a political writer, though she makes no attempt to promote specific political views in her fiction. A few critics maintain that downplaying the politics of her stories evades her political responsibility.

Because Gordimer has chosen to write about the small moments in people’s lives, her writing receives almost a universal warm welcome today, in contrast with the 1950s and 1960s, when such “small moments” were sometimes criticized as both didactic and apolitical. Today, in light of the trend toward minimalism in fiction, “small moments” are almost universally acknowledged to be suitable topics for literature.

Several short stories in *Six Feet of the Country* (1956) and *Friday’s Footprint and Other Stories* (1960) display the influence of Guy de Maupassant, Honoré de Balzac, and Gustave Flaubert in their objectivity, realism, and satiric edge. Gordimer herself has cited Marcel Proust, Anton Chekhov, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky as major influences.

***A Guest of Honour*** *A Guest of Honour* (1970), for which Gordimer received the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, is regarded by many critics as her finest work. John Cooke says that a certain duality appears for the first time in Gordimer’s work in this novel: “she at once observes her world from without and envisions it from within.”

***Burger’s Daughter*** *Burger’s Daughter* (1979) examines white ambivalence about apartheid in the person of Rosa, who can no longer sustain the antiapartheid cause of her imprisoned Afrikaner father after his death. This work, like several others before it, was banned in South Africa,

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many nations throughout the world, even today, have permitted or encouraged barriers between ethnicities, religious groups, or genders. These barriers impose separation, or segregation. Here are some works that examine segregation’s effects.

*Invisible Man* (1952), a novel by Ralph Ellison. The award-winning novel follows the struggles of a bright, promising young African American boy who struggles against the pervasive racism of post–World War II America.

*Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (1996), a book based on a true story by Doris Pilkington. Three adolescent Aboriginal girls defy forced separation from their homeland and relocation to isolated “native settlement stations.”

*Biko* (1978), a biography by Donald Woods. Biography of Steven Biko, the leader of the nonviolent South African Black Consciousness Movement, who died in 1977 under suspicious circumstances while in police custody.

*Princess* (1992), a book based on a true story by Jean P. Sasson. This work details how gender segregation within conservative Muslim society affects a contemporary Saudi Arabian princess.

but the ban was quickly removed due to the critical attention the novel had attracted in the West. Judith Chettle noted that it was one of the books that “gained Gordimer an international audience,” but added: “Gordimer astutely described the liberal politics of white and mostly English-speaking South Africa. She was much less incisive in dealing with those Afrikaners supporting the regime and was least successful in describing the blacks.”

***July’s People*** *July’s People* (1981) focuses on a liberal white family forced to depend on the providence of a black man who was previously their servant. Through this reversal of roles, the novel reveals deep-rooted feelings of prejudice and racial supremacy in even the most open-minded individuals. Anne Tyler commented: “*July’s People* demonstrates with breathtaking clarity the tensions and complex interdependencies between whites and blacks in South Africa. It is so flawlessly written that every one of its events seems chillingly, ominously possible.”

Gordimer’s insight, integrity, and compassion inspire critical admiration among many. “She has mapped out the social, political and emotional geography of that troubled land with extraordinary passion and precision,” commented Michiko Kakutani of the *New York Times*, observing in a later essay that “taken chronologically, her work not only reflects her own evolving political consciousness and maturation as an artist—an early lyricism has given way to an increased preoccupation with ideas

and social issues—but it also charts changes in South Africa’s social climate.”

## Responses to Literature

1. Gordimer does not “preach” to her readers, but rather lets them draw their own conclusions from the details she presents. Do you think this is an effective literary technique, or do you think it leaves room for misinterpretation, depending on the reader?
2. Gordimer has been criticized for refusing to write fiction with an overtly political point of view. As a white woman, she was part of the “ruling class” during apartheid. Would any political solution she proposed be affected by her experiences as part of the privileged white society, or, because of her status, did she have a responsibility to promote specific political solutions in her work?
3. Research the definition of the word “propaganda” and find three examples of well-known novels that have been labeled as propaganda. What prompts such labeling? Do you think propaganda can be art?
4. Research how Africa and South Africa are portrayed by other writers. Write a paper examining the way African countries are represented. Do the representations differ according to the writer’s gender or race? If so, how?

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## Maxim Gorky

BORN: 1868, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia

DIED: 1936, Moscow, USSR

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Lower Depths* (1902)

*Mother* (1907)

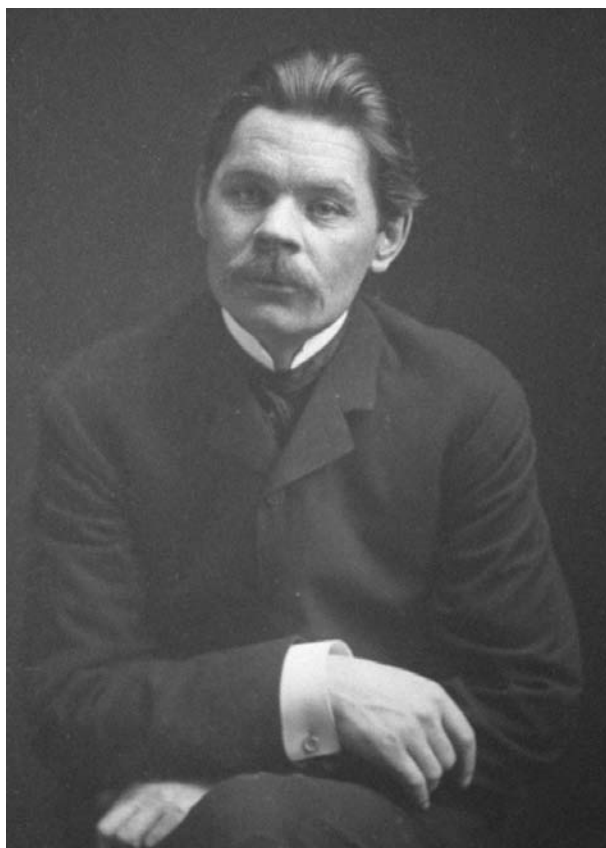
*In the World* (1916)

*My Universities* (1923)

*My Childhood* (1928)

## Overview

Maxim Gorky (a pseudonym for Alexei Maximovich Peshkov) is recognized as one of the earliest and foremost exponents of socialist realism in literature. His brutal yet romantic portraits of Russian life and his sympathetic depictions of the working class had an inspirational effect on the oppressed people of his native land. From 1910 until his death, Gorky was considered Russia’s greatest living writer. Gorky the tramp, the rebel, is as much a legend as the strong, individual characters presented in his stories. His



Maxim Gorky Gorky, Maxim, photograph. The Library of Congress.

hero was a new type in the history of Russian literature—a figure drawn from the masses of a growing industrialized society; his most famous novel, *Mother* (1907), was the first in that country to portray the factory worker as a force destined to overthrow the existing order.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***An Orphan and a Runaway*** Gorky was orphaned at the age of ten and raised by his maternal grandparents. He was often treated harshly by his grandfather, and Gorky received what little kindness he experienced as a child from his grandmother. During his thirteenth year, Gorky ran away from Nizhny Novgorod, the city of his birth (later renamed Gorky), and lived a precarious existence as a tramp and vagrant, wandering from one job to another. Frequently beaten by his employers, nearly always hungry and ill-clothed, Gorky came to know the seamy side of Russian life as few writers before him. At the age of nineteen, he attempted suicide by shooting himself in the chest. The event became a turning point in Gorky's life; his outlook changed from one of despair to one of hope. Within a few years he began publishing stories in the provincial press. Written under the pseudonym Maxim Gorky (Maxim the Bitter), these stories stressed the strength and individualism of the Russian peasant. When they were collected and published in *Ocherki i rasskazy* (1898–99), Gorky gained recognition throughout Russia. His second volume of stories, *Rasskazy* (1900–10), along with the production of his controversial play *The Lower Depths* (1902), assured his success and brought him acclaim in western Europe and the United States.

***Revolutionary Writer*** Gorky's fame in the West coincided with increasing suspicion from the Russian authorities, who considered the author a source of the country's growing political unrest. In 1901, he was briefly jailed for publishing the revolutionary poem "Song of the Stormy Petrel" in a Marxist review. Three years later, he established the Znanie publishing firm to provide a forum for socially conscious writers. The friendship and advice of revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin strengthened Gorky's growing political radicalism. He was very active during the revolution of 1905, and after its failure he was forced to flee abroad. He was allowed to return home in 1913, and again he resumed his revolutionary activities. During the 1917 revolution and the ensuing years of political chaos, Gorky saved the lives of several intellectuals by interceding on their behalf with the communist regime. He left Russia one last time and settled on the island of Capri for health reasons. In 1928, on his sixtieth birthday, he returned to the Soviet Union to a national celebration of his literary, cultural, and moral contributions to the socialist cause. His death several years later, allegedly by poisoning, is still enveloped in mystery.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gorky's famous contemporaries include:

- Thomas Edison** (1847–1931): Edison was the first inventor to industrialize his efforts. His most notable inventions include the phonograph, the incandescent light bulb, and direct current (DC) electricity distribution.
- Joseph Conrad** (1857–1924): Polish-born Conrad did not learn English until adulthood, but became one of the greatest English-language novelists; several of his books were adapted into films, notably *Heart of Darkness*, which inspired the Vietnam War epic *Apocalypse Now*.
- Ezra Pound** (1885–1972): A leader in the Modernist movement and an American expatriate who once called America "a lunatic asylum," Pound remained a respected poet, translator, and literary critic to his death.
- Edith Wharton** (1862–1937): Wharton was an American novelist and short story writer known for her piercing, ironic critiques of the hypocrisies and mores of upper-class Edwardian society.
- Vladimir Lenin** (1870–1924): A leading revolutionary in Tsarist Russia, Lenin went on to lead the October Revolution of 1917 and became the first leader of the Soviet Union. His contributions to Marx's work spawned a new form of Communism known as Leninism.
- Anton Chekhov** (1860–1904): A practicing doctor for most of his life, Chekhov was known for his short stories and plays.

### Works in Literary Context

***The Proletarian, or Working Class, Hero*** Gorky's heroes represent protest and unrest: either tramps, cold and hungry but free and without superiors to command them; or strong, positive, lonesomen.

Gorky differentiates his characters according to their ideology; their personal relationships only emphasize their ideological clashes. The domestic conflict, for example, in *Smug Citizens* (1902) is projected onto a social canvas, and the play acquires a political dimension especially topical in pre-1905 Russia. Also in *Smug Citizens*, the worker Nil emerges as the first proletarian character in Russian theater. He, like Gorky himself, hates the small bourgeoisie and their materialism. Gorky once explained that Nil was "a man calmly confident in his strength and in his right to change life," the shortcomings of which aroused in his soul "only one feeling—a passionate desire to do away with them." The working men, "tattered, drenched with sweat," were singled out by Gorky as the only hope for the future. In the smug middle class he saw nothing but decay. Through this attitude, the formerly romantic Gorky arrived at the straightforward and rugged



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Gorky practically defines the literary genre of social realism, yet other works address similar themes.

*The Jungle* (1906), by Upton Sinclair. Although written as a novel, this work by crusading journalist Sinclair was also intended as an exposé of the unsanitary conditions prevailing in American meat plants and of the inhumane conditions low-wage workers were forced to endure on the job. The novel sparked public outcry and forced the government to impose laws governing safe preparation of food.

*Germinal* (1885), by Emile Zola. Considered by many critics to be the greatest French-language novel ever written, this seminal work of realist literature tells the story of a coal miners' strike in harshly realistic terms.

*Sister Carrie* (1900), by Theodore Dreiser. Scandalous upon its initial publication, this novel tells the story of a young woman who uses her charms to seduce a succession of men in pursuit of becoming an actress.

*Studs Lonigan* (1938), by James T. Farrell. This trilogy of novels traces the coming of age of a young Irish-American living on the South Side of Chicago while it simultaneously takes a larger look at the self-perpetuating nature of ethnic ghettos.

realism that connected him with one of the basic traditions of Russian literature.

**Attack Against the Intelligentsia** After 1902, Gorky wrote a series of plays attacking the new intelligentsia. *Summer Folk* takes up where Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard* leaves off: the inheritors of a cherry orchard have, instead of creating a better world, settled for the complacency and futility of their predecessors' lives. "We do nothing except talk an awful lot," says one character, while another ends a long diatribe on the intelligentsia's alienation from the masses with self-reproach: "We have created our alienation ourselves... we deserve our torments." *Summer Folk* is one of Gorky's most static plays; however, the topicality of the play excited the audiences of the day.

**Writing Across Genres, From Short Stories to Plays** Gorky's work can be divided into three distinct groups. The first comprises his short stories, which many critics consider superior to his novels. In a highly romantic manner, these stories portray the subjugation of Russian peasants and vagrants. Many of these tales, such as "Makar Chudra" and "Chelkash," are based on actual peasant legends and allegories. In them, Gorky championed the wisdom and self-reliance of vagabonds over the brutality of the decadent bourgeoisie. The second group consists of Gorky's autobiographical works, notably the trilogy *My Childhood* (1928), *In the World* (1916), and *My Universities* (1923), and his reminiscences of Tolstoy,

*Reminiscences of Leo Nicolayevitch Tolstoi* (1919). The trilogy is considered one of the finest autobiographies in the Russian language. The work reveals Gorky as an acute observer of detail with a particular talent for describing people. The third group, by far the largest, consists of a number of novels and plays that are not as artistically successful as his short stories and autobiography. Gorky's first novel, *Foma Gordeyev* (1900), illustrates his characteristic admiration for the hard-working, honest individual. The novel was the first of many in which the author portrayed the rise of Russian capitalism. Among the twelve plays Gorky wrote between 1901 and 1913, only one, *The Lower Depths*, deals with the "dregs of society." Though the play has most of the structural faults of his other dramas, primarily one-dimensional characters and a preachy tone, it is still regarded as one of the greatest proletarian dramas of the twentieth century. Gorky's other plays, including *The Smug Citizens* (1902), *The Barbarians* (1906), and *Yegor Bulichov and Others* (1932), focus either on the intelligentsia or on the struggle between capitalist and socialist forces in pre-Soviet Russia.

### Works in Critical Context

Whatever the ambiguities of Gorky's political allegiances after the Bolsheviks (the early Communists of the 1917 Russian Revolution) came to power, the Soviet government saw him as a figure who could help bring prestige to the young regime. The authorities came to refer to him as the "father of Soviet literature" and even named various schools, theaters, institutes, ships, and factories after him during his lifetime. Yet, following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, some of the most prominent entities reverted to their former names: hence, Gorky Street in Moscow again became known as Tverskaia Street, and the large city where he was born, located on the Volga River, reverted from Gorky to its earlier name of Nizhny Novgorod.

**Ideology over Artistry** Despite his success and importance as a socialist writer, most modern critics agree that Gorky deserves little of the idolatrous attention that he has received. They argue that his work suffers from an overly dramatic quality, a coarse, careless style, and an externally imposed structure that results in fiction motivated by ideology rather than by artistry. Many critics suggest that his failure to develop his characters and his tendency to lapse into irrelevant discussions about the meaning of life greatly damage the seriousness of his subjects. However, in his short stories and, especially in his autobiography, Gorky fully realized his artistic powers. In these works he managed to curb his ideology and focus on those talents for which he has been consistently lauded: realistic description and the ability to portray the brutality of his environment. For these, Gorky was called by Stefan Zweig one of "the few genuine marvels of our present world."

**Intellectuals and Common Men** While critical regard for his work fluctuates, Gorky has been positioned



as the precursor of socialist realism and, therefore, an important stimulus in twentieth-century Russian literature. With Vladimir Mayakovsky and Aleksandr Blok, he was one of the few Russian writers who played an equally important part in his country both before and after the Bolshevik Revolution. Although Gorky was an intellectual, and thus distanced from the common people who overthrew the Czarists and Mensheviks, he used his influence and talent after October 1917 to prevent the revolution from consuming itself in a savage blood-frenzy. As Janko Lavrin has noted, "It was here that his personality and his work served as a bridge between the creative values of the old intelligentsia culture and the culture of the risen masses, anxious to build up a new world."

**Influence** In the cultural world Gorky was the guiding force behind literary groups before the revolution, did all that he could to protect and nourish a fragile Russian culture during the Civil War, and later helped many young writers make their way into Soviet literature. Some of his own writings, in particular his novels, have had a mixed reputation, but many of the works that have largely fallen out of view—most of his plays of the 1910s and his stories of the 1920s—are worthy of rediscovery. Ultimately his literary reputation rests securely on a handful of acknowledged masterpieces: his play *The Lower Depths*; stories such as "Twenty-Six Men and a Girl"; his memoirs of leading writers (especially Tolstoy); and, finally, his autobiographical writings, which offer an unmatched view of provincial Russia.

## Responses to Literature

1. Gorky infused his characters and place names with symbolic meaning. Read one of Gorky's short stories and analyze the symbolism behind its setting and characters in a 3–4-page essay.
2. Read Gorky's play *Summer Folk*. In a 5–7-page essay, analyze how the Russian Revolution might have impacted Gorky's work and literary style. Use examples from the text to support your ideas.
3. With a classmate, research the terms "socialist realism" and "simple realism". Then, discuss what you think makes Gorky's work socialist realism as opposed to simple realism.
4. In his play *The Lower Depths*, Gorky contrasts the moral standpoints of "truth" versus the "consoling lie." Write a personal essay describing your feelings on this issue. Is it better to always tell the truth, or to spare someone's feelings with an omission or half-truth?

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## Patricia Grace

BORN: 1937, Wellington, New Zealand

NATIONALITY: New Zealander

GENRE: Fiction, short fiction, children's fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Waiariki* (1975)

*The Dream Sleepers and Other Stories* (1980)

*Potiki* (1986)

*Baby No-Eye* (1999)

## Overview

Patricia Grace is considered New Zealand's foremost Maori woman writer. She writes short stories and novels that place the reader at the intersection between native and Western cultures in modern New Zealand, and her work explores the challenges her people have faced and continue to face as they seek to retain their traditions and their lands.



Patricia Grace Barry Durrant / Getty Images

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***New Zealand and the Maori People*** New Zealand was annexed by Great Britain in 1840, and British officials negotiated treaties with some of the native Maori tribes that, according to the British, acknowledged British control of the region in exchange for property and other rights. However, the Maori translation of the treaty did not accurately reflect these terms, and British control of New Zealand was disputed by many of the Maori people. The population of the Maori went into decline, with a drop of over fifty percent in the sixty years following British annexation. The varied Maori culture saw a resurgence in the twentieth century, particularly from the 1960s onward, though many Maori still face racism and the problems stemming from long-standing disputes over land and property rights, and the urbanization of the Maori people has raised concerns over the ability of the culture to remain distinct from Western influences.

***Early and Enduring Success*** Patricia Grace was born in 1937 in Wellington, New Zealand. She studied

at St. Anne's School and St. Mary's College. She began writing after studying New Zealand literature at Wellington Teachers' Training College. At the age of twenty-five, she was a teacher and the mother of a growing family. Unlike many young authors who struggle to get into print, she had early success due to her subject matter and her grasp of Maori narrative techniques. After her first collection of short stories, *Waiariki*, won the PEN/Hubert Church Award, she was encouraged to write a novel. She has since taught writing and published several novels while raising her family of seven children.

### Works in Literary Context

Grace is probably New Zealand's foremost Maori woman writer. Her collection of short stories, *Waiariki* (1975), was the first collection of short stories published by a female Maori writer. Her 1978 novel, *Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps*, was the first novel by a Maori woman writer. Her writing is expressive of a distinctive Maori consciousness and set of values, but it is notable also for the varied portrayal of Maori ways of life and for its versatility of style and narrative technique. Though distinctly re-creating Maori stories, Grace's style of writing also borrows elements from the modernist realist tradition.

***The Postcolonial Experience*** Many of Grace's stories deal with the determination of identity and the experience of cultural conflict that are part of postcolonial experience, especially in settler societies. In Grace's works, the experience of difference is neither presented as a way of finding identity nor as a matter of choice, negotiation, or even assertion. Instead it is represented as a nonnegotiable fact that simply has to be accepted.

### Works in Critical Context

Grace is well-known in international literary circles and is widely considered a leading New Zealand writer. She has won numerous awards for her writing, including the PEN/Hubert Church Award for Best First Book of Fiction, inclusion in the fiction section of the New Zealand Book Awards, the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, and the Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement.

***Potiki*** Grace is best known for her 1986 novel *Potiki*, which won the New Zealand Award for Fiction. This novel is made up of many stories, including personal accounts from the characters' lives as well as tribal myths and legends. In the book, Grace makes a case for the value of tradition and respect for the future. The book was praised for its presentation of the cadences of Maori language as well as for the more political tone. Two

themes—the difficulties faced by Maori children taught only in English and the attempts to wrest traditional lands from Maori hands—caused controversy when the work was published. Writing in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, Michael Owen Jones remarked on the author’s “great sensitivity.” Commenting on Grace’s style, Jones maintained that it “captures the rhythms of the finest oral poetry. Her imagery is memorable and her observations are penetrating.”

## Responses to Literature

1. Grace is a Maori who attended non-Maori schools. In what ways does her Western education present itself in her works? Is her Western education a positive or negative influence on her writing?
2. What unique obstacles face a woman writer emerging from a native tradition? In what ways are these obstacles evident in Grace’s works?
3. Grace is noted for expressing the distinctive Maori consciousness and the values of the Maori people. After reading some of her works, list the features of the Maori perspective that you have noted. Write an essay describing these features and indicating where in Grace’s writings you discovered them.
4. Grace explores the experiences of native people living within Western culture. Write a story or an essay about your experiences living within Western culture, whether it’s from an insider’s or outsider’s perspective. Be sure to note which perspective you have.

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## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Grace’s famous contemporaries include:

- Václav Havel** (1936–): Czech author who became the president of Czechoslovakia after the fall of communism in 1989.
- Thomas Pynchon** (1937–): American novelist known for his dense and complex postmodern style of writing.
- Hunter S. Thompson** (1937–2005): American journalist and author best known for creating the “gonzo” style of journalism.
- Hans Herbjørnsrud** (1938–): Norwegian author whose works explore the connections between language and identity.
- Judy Blume** (1938–): American author who has achieved widespread popularity because of her books for children and young adults, which frequently tackle difficult and controversial issues.
- Germaine Greer** (1939–): Australian scholar who was one of the most important voices of feminism in the late twentieth century.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Grace’s fiction provides readers with a look at the cross-cultural experiences of natives living within Western cultures. Here are some other works with a similar perspective:

- House Made of Dawn* (1969), a novel by M. Scott Momaday. This Pulitzer Prize-winning novel tells the story of a Native American who grew up on a reservation and subsequently lives both in and out of nonnative society.
- Almanac of the Dead* (1991), a novel by Leslie Marmon Silko. This novel, which tells a variety of stories about characters living in the American Southwest and Central America, pursues the theme of the reclamation of native lands.
- Ao Toa: Earth Warriors* (2005), a novel by Cathie Dunsford. This novel explores conflicts between local tribal interests and the demands of the corporate, globalized world through the story of a group of Maoris struggling against the use of pesticides and genetic engineering.

### Periodicals

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## ■ Kenneth Grahame

BORN: 1859, Edinburgh, Scotland

DIED: 1932, Pangbourne, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Golden Age* (1895)

*Dream Days* (1898)

*The Wind in the Willows*  
(1907)

*The Reluctant Dragon*  
(1938)

*Bertie's Escapade* (1949)

### Overview

British author Kenneth Grahame established an early reputation as a writer with his short stories about children and their imaginative worlds, but he is remembered by succeeding generations primarily for the novel *The Wind in the Willows* (1907). Critics have counted Grahame among a special group of writers who have successfully created “unreal worlds,” including J. R. R. Tolkien, Lewis Carroll, and Nikolai Gogol.



Kenneth Grahame Frederick Hollyer / Getty Images

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Early Death of Mother** Grahame was born on March 8, 1859, in Edinburgh, Scotland. When he was about a year old, his family moved to Argyllshire, where his father had been appointed to the post of sheriff substitute. There, in 1864, his mother died from scarlet fever (an infectious bacterial disease common before the development of antibiotics in the twentieth century) following the birth of her third son, Roland. Grahame also caught the infection but recovered under the care of his maternal grandmother. Shortly after this the four children went to live with her at Cookham Dene in Berkshire. Their father stayed behind to mourn his wife and developed a dependency on alcohol.

**Raised Primarily by Grandmother** Grahame would later recall these few years at Cookham Dene with affection in his two collections of reminiscences, *The Golden Age* (1895) and *Dream Days* (1898). “Granny” Ingles may not have been the stereotypical doting grandmother—hard financial circumstances and a stern Presbyterian nature worked against that—but the happy memories of those years were also, in part, the foundation for *The Wind in the Willows*.

Grahame and his brothers and sister first moved with their grandmother in 1866 to a smaller cottage after repairs became necessary to Cookham Dene, and then back to their father’s house when he unexpectedly summoned them home. Their stay there lasted less than a year. In the spring of 1867, their father resigned his post and went abroad, and the children were sent back to their grandmother. It was the last time they were to live with their father. He died in France in 1887, and of the three surviving children only Grahame was present at the funeral in Le Havre.

**Unfulfilling Banking Career** In 1868 both Grahame and his older brother, Willie, were enrolled in St. Edward’s School in Oxford, where Grahame excelled during the next seven years. However, in 1875, at the start of Grahame’s last year at St. Edward’s, Willie died from a severe inflammation of the lungs. The following year the family, refusing to support Grahame’s application for Oxford, insisted instead that he apply for a clerkship in the Bank of England. He spent much of the next three decades working for the institution.

Moving to London, Grahame came in contact with writers. He published his first piece in the *St. James Gazette* in 1888, and spent 1891 to 1895 publishing in the *National Observer*. Some of the essays from the *National Observer* were collected in his first book *Pagan Papers* (1894). While Grahame tried to emulate Robert Louis Stevenson, the works were not as intellectually tough as Stevenson’s. They do, however, introduce

themes that recurred in his later works, including the idea of the Pan myth that was part of *The Wind in the Willows*.

**Writing for Children** The first edition of *Pagan Papers* contains six short stories about children as well. Grahame continued to publish short stories about children over the next year—some in the literary magazine the *Yellow Book*—which were collected in *The Golden Age* (1895). The book was embraced by both critics and readers when it was first published, in part because of its originality. Grahame wrote more stories about some of the characters, which were collected in *Dream Days* (1898). Both books were reprinted several times in the early 1900s. In 1898, he became the secretary of the Bank of England, one of its three highest executive officers.

**Origins of *The Wind in the Willows*** As Grahame was succeeding professionally as both a banker and a writer, his personal life was also being transformed. He married Elspeth Thomson in 1899, and the couple had their only child, Alastair, in 1900. The child was blind in one eye and had severe defects in the other. Though Grahame's marriage was a failure, he enjoyed inventing tales for his son. Some of these bedtime stories became *The Wind in the Willows*, and were written down in book form by the author in 1907.

Grahame resigned from his high position at the Bank of England in June 1908, three months after his forty-ninth birthday and four months before the publication of *The Wind in the Willows*. Grahame may have seen retirement as preferable to continuing in a job that he had not chosen for himself. With the royalties that accrued from the unexpected and continuing success of *The Wind in the Willows*, he moved the family to Blewbury in 1910, put together *The Cambridge Book of Poetry for Children* (1916), and traveled extensively. Even World War I, which engulfed much of Europe from 1914 to 1918 and saw eight hundred thousand Britons lose their lives, had little effect on the author.

**Loss of Son** While Grahame's literary endeavors were limited as he pursued a life of leisure, his life did suffer one significant tragedy. When his son entered Oxford University, he started to develop mental problems. In 1920, after his problems involving a religious crisis worsened, his decapitated body was found on the railroad tracks near the university. An inquest ruled it an accidental death, but the circumstances make it more likely that Alastair committed suicide.

Following Alastair's death, the Grahames went to Italy for an extended stay and then moved to Pangbourne in 1924. Grahame suffered from circulatory problems while he was there, and he died on July 6, 1932, of a cerebral hemorrhage.

## Works in Literary Context

**Evolution of Writing for Children** As an author, Grahame was very much of his time, the golden age of

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Grahame's famous contemporaries include:

**Marcel Proust** (1871–1922): A French realist novelist who wrote the seven-volume *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913–1927).

**Eugene O'Neill** (1888–1953): An American playwright whose expressionistic psychological explorations were influenced by Freud and Nietzsche and included *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (1943) and *A Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956).

**Mori Ōgai** (1862–1922): A Japanese army physician, writer, and translator of Western literature. His works include *The Dancing Girl* (1890).

**Georges Seurat** (1859–1891): A French painter who was an originator of pointillism, a technique where the picture is made up of very small dots of pure color on a white canvas, as seen in his large masterpiece *Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1886).

**William Tecumseh Sherman** (1820–1891): An American army officer who served during the Civil War. He captured Atlanta in 1864 and began his famous "March to the Sea," a campaign that effectively cut the Confederacy in half and precipitated the end of the war.

children's literature. It was the period when classics such as *Peter Pan*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Pinocchio*, *The Secret Garden*, and *Winnie the Pooh*, appeared. Scholars of children's literature have determined that the definition of what is appropriate reading for children changes with cultural notions of what it means to be a child, a concept that changed considerably during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Eighteenth-century popular views of children, dominated by religion and the doctrine of Original Sin, gave way to a literature dominated by moral tales and instruction in the early nineteenth century. Children were seen as rational but imperfect. By mid-century, the trend was shifting again, as romantic perceptions of unblemished purity, beauty, and innocence in children began to prevail. As a result, children's literature began to be characterized by more playful poems, stories, and entertainment based on fantasy or adventure.

**Merging Fact and Fiction** In 1859, when Grahame was born, the two dominant trends in children's literature, didacticism and entertainment based on fantasy, were blended to a certain extent. This meant that stories tended to offer a "sugared pill"—a lesson taken in through entertainment. But the trend to incorporate a moral lesson into a work otherwise dedicated to fantasy was already beginning to recede. In 1865, Lewis Carroll



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In Grahame's early works, he wrote about animal protagonists living in a world that was at once both real and wholly unreal. Here are some other works that share the same rich fantasy theme:

*The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902), a story collection by Beatrix Potter. Potter's classic tales and elegant watercolor illustrations use the animals of the countryside she observed around her home in the English Lake District to convey simple domestic morals.

*Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926), a novel by A. A. Milne. Milne was a dramatist, novelist, and satirist, but he will always be remembered best for the books he wrote for his son, Christopher Robin. What the adult sees as a shelf of stuffed animal toys, the child sees as a fully formed community of distinct personalities: the gloomy Eeyore, the excitable Tigger, the fussy Kanga, the shy Piglet, and the rest.

*The Complete Calvin and Hobbes* (2005), a collection of comics by Bill Watterson. While Calvin is certainly more badly behaved than the creatures of Toad Hall, Watterson captures all of the rebellious creative energy of childhood in these comic strips. Along with his best friend and conscience Hobbes, whom everyone else sees as just a stuffed tiger, Calvin lives in a richly imaginative world where nagging teachers are ghoulish space aliens, angry fathers are snarling dinosaurs, and friendly girls are conspirators aiming at world domination.

published *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, an extreme fantasy for its time. The more realistic children's works of Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, and Louisa May Alcott began to look out of date.

Grahame's works were finely tuned to a young child's mind, not least in the merging of outward facts with the inward fictions of fantasy. Such Industrial Revolution icons as motors and trains exist alongside medieval dungeons in his stories. And in *The Wind in the Willows*, the very size of the creatures varies from scene to scene. "The Toad was train-size; the train was Toad-size" was how Grahame answered questions about this.

**English Pastoralism** Much that is characteristic in *The Wind in the Willows* was foreshadowed in Grahame's two earlier books. *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days* feature the camaraderie, the food and feasts, the secret haunts, the obsession with boats and water, the long days of summer, the pantheism, and the woods under winter snows as well as the literary ambiances. In these earlier books, the wide world is always near, however. In *The Wind in the Willows*, the days are always carefree

and the clock is stopped. Its potent English pastoral dream—reflected too in much eighteenth-century poetry—remains unchanged.

**Influences** Grahame's influence, especially through *The Wind in the Willows*, can be seen in animal fantasy writings of authors from Alison Uttley (1884–1976)—whose first books were a series of tales about animals, including Little Grey Rabbit, the Little Red Fox, Sam Pig and Hare—to Richard Adams, author of *Watership Down* (1972), a fantasy novel in which rabbits search for the promised land.

### Works in Critical Context

While Grahame's short story collections have receded into obscurity over the years, *The Wind in the Willows* has proven highly popular with readers of all ages since its initial publication in 1907 and has received increasing critical attention for its satire, social commentary, and treatment of rural life.

***The Wind in the Willows*** The modest literary success of *Pagan Papers* was eclipsed by the reception of *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days*, which were so successful both in England and America that the initial reception of *The Wind in the Willows* was colored by the disappointment contemporary readers and reviewers felt when Grahame apparently abandoned his realistic, if poetic, evocations of childhood for a fantasy involving animal characters. Some even thought Grahame had forfeited his credentials as a serious writer of children's literature.

"For ourselves," one of the earliest critics wrote, "we lay *The Wind in the Willows* reverently aside, and again, for the hundredth time, take up *The Golden Age*." Another early critic took a bolder view, writing, "The author may call his chief characters the Rat, the Mole, the Toad—they are human beings, and are meant to be nothing but human beings. . . . The book is an urbane exercise in irony at the expense of the English human character and mankind. It is entirely successful."

Despite the book's nostalgic appeal, many commentators—such as Lois Kuznets—have accused *The Wind in the Willows* of displaying misogynistic tendencies due to its recurring dismissals of female characters and occasional lapses into negative language when speaking about the opposite sex. Claire Welsh asserted that "it can also be viewed as undermining its own apparent misogyny with a playful theatrical approach to gender construction."

Neil Philip believes that *The Wind in the Willows* has been able to retain its wide appeal because it "possesses in abundance that quality which Ezra Pound defined as the true classic: 'a certain eternal and irrepressible freshness.'"

### Responses to Literature

1. How does Grahame portray the differences between children and adults in *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days*? Write a paper that outlines your findings.

2. Discuss the tension between the love of adventure and the nostalgia for home in *The Wind in the Willows*. Create a presentation with the results of your discussion.
3. Critics have drawn parallels between *The Wind in the Willows* and Homer's ancient Greek epic *The Odyssey*. Do some research on *The Odyssey* and describe any parallels you see to Grahame's story in a paper.
4. Describe the different social classes to which the animal characters in *The Wind in the Willows* belong. Do you think the story may be seen as an endorsement or criticism of class hierarchies in English society? Create a visual presentation with your conclusions.
5. Why do you think Grahame chose not to include any female animal characters in *The Wind in the Willows*? In a group setting, stage a debate using your findings.

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## Günter Grass

BORN: 1927, Free City of Danzig, Poland

NATIONALITY: German

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, drama, nonfiction

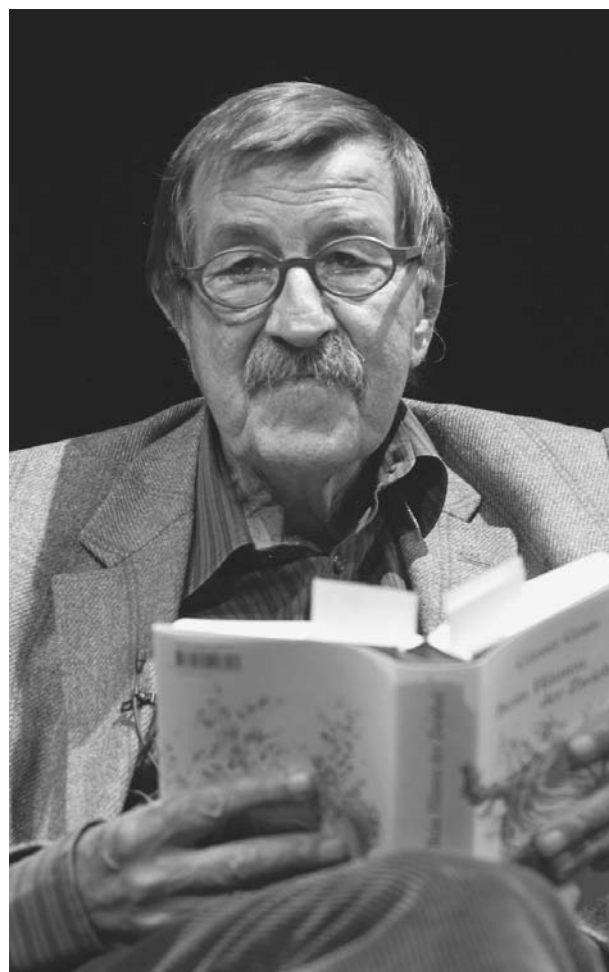
MAJOR WORKS:

*The Tin Drum* (1959)

*Dog Years* (1963)

*Local Anesthetic* (1969)

*Peeling the Onion* (2006)



Gunter Grass AP Images

## Overview

Both inspirational and controversial, Nobel Prize-winning author Günter Grass has been called the conscience of postwar Germany. Internationally recognized for novels that grapple with issues of collective guilt and moral ambiguity, Grass is known for saying “The job of a citizen is to keep his mouth open”—and living up to that motto with work that calls the past, present, and future of Germany into question. Though his work has placed him in the position of moral yardstick and national ethical voice, his own past as a Nazi soldier has been condemned in recent years.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Growing up Under Nazism** Günter Wilhelm Grass was born in the Free City of Danzig (now Gdansk, Poland) on October 16, 1927. The city, which is historically German, changed loyalties often during European wars and was a center for the German Nazi Party in Poland. Grass himself joined the Hitler Youth as a child, and tried to volunteer for the German navy in the early 1940s as a way of escaping his lower-class Catholic family. Although the name Hitler Youth implies indoctrination into the ideals of Nazism, joining the organization became essentially mandatory in areas under German control, and many of the children involved were indifferent or even opposed to Hitler’s aims. Grass’s family, who were grocers and cabinetmakers, raised him in a mundane environment not usually associated with social evil. However, Danzig and the rest of German-occupied Europe became a breeding ground for Nazism, resulting in the massacre of millions of Jews and civilians during World War II.

Though he served with the *Waffen-SS*, the elite Nazi army unit, during World War II, this period of Grass’s personal history remains somewhat mysterious due to his long silence on the matter. What is known is that Grass was wounded and sent to an American prisoner-of-war camp in 1945. Once the war was over, Grass was forced to tour the concentration camp at Dachau, an experience that led him to question Nazi philosophies for the first time.

**Postwar Experiences** After his release from American custody in 1946, Grass spent time working on a potato farm and in a potash mine. In 1947, he began an apprenticeship to a stonemason, playing drums in a jazz band by night and studying metal sculpture in Berlin after trips throughout Europe and time spent in an arts academy. He married Anna Schwarz, a Swiss dancer, in 1954.

Grass had begun writing years earlier: At age thirteen he entered a “novel” entitled *The Kashubians* in a contest sponsored by a Nazi school magazine, and was awarded third prize in a poetry contest sponsored by South German Radio in 1955. Some of his poems, short plays, and essays were published in *Akzente*, a literary magazine, and Grass’s first book of poetry, *The Advantages of Wind-*

*chickens* appeared in 1956. His early surrealistic plays *Hochwasser* (1963; translated as *Floor*, 1967) and *Onkel, Onkel!* (1965; translated as *Mister, Mister*, 1967) and his ballet *Stoffreste (Cloth Remnants)* premiered in small and experimental theaters around Germany.

**Return to Gdansk** In 1955, Grass read some of his writing at the Berlin meeting of the Gruppe (Group) 47, an informal but extremely influential association of political writers organized in 1947 by writer Hans Werner Richter. Grass’s talent was recognized by the group, who encouraged him to try his hand at a novel. In 1956, he moved to Paris with Anna to work in earnest on his novel, returning to Gdansk in 1958. This trip was partially financed by a prize he won from Gruppe 47 for reading portions of his work in progress aloud. The book, which would be titled *The Tin Drum*, was published in 1959 and permanently placed Grass among the leading literary figures of the twentieth century. The book uses Grass’s own experiences and insights as the basis for the fictional autobiography of a Danzig boy who decides not to grow up.

By 1963, when *The Tin Drum* appeared in the United States, Grass had published a second volume of poetry and drawings, *Gleisdreieck (Rail Triangle)*; a novella, *Katz und Maus* (translated as *Cat and Mouse*); and another novel, *Hundejahre* (translated as *Dog Years*). *Cat and Mouse* and *Dog Years* would complete what came to be known as the Danzig Trilogy (*The Tin Drum* being the first book in the trilogy), three works that deal with Germany’s past through the warped lenses of artists and outcasts.

Not content to limit his literary production to novels, Grass also composed a number of plays throughout the 1950s and 1960s. His play *The Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising: A German Tragedy* met with controversy in 1966, with its portrayal of “The Boss” (commonly thought to represent German playwright Bertolt Brecht) leading to criticism and scandal.

**Assessment of Germany** Grass continued to grapple with political issues of the day and his own growing inclinations toward socialism in books like *From the Diary of a Snail* (1972), a fictionalized account of his involvement with a 1969 political campaign, *The Flounder* (1977), which deals with radical feminism, and *The Rat* (1986), a novel about the sad plight of modern civilization. Throughout the 1980s, Grass continued to touch on politics and Germany’s past, culminating in a series of works concerning German reunification around the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Grass’s view that, after Auschwitz, the Germans should not be permitted to live together in one nation, proved immensely unpopular, and his 1995 novel on the subject, *Ein Weites Feld* (translated as *Too Far Afield*), met with harsh criticism.

Unable to let go of his assessment and reassessment of Germany’s past, Grass published *My Century* in 1999. The book, which tells one hundred brief stories (one for every year of the twentieth century), met with mixed reviews. Its episodes are told from the perspective of

Nazis, working-class people, and other figures; some critics accused Grass's selection as being too random and arbitrary to hold much meaning, while others praised the technique. In 1999, Grass was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his body of work.

Around this time, Grass became more interested in politics, aligning himself with the Social Democratic movement in Germany and even writing speeches for German politician Willy Brandt. Grass responded to the growing student movement and other political changes in his poetry and drawings, publishing books like *Ausgefragt* and *New Poems* during the 1960s. *Örtlich betäubt* (*Local Anesthetic*), his attempt to address the political upheaval of the 1960s in novel form, met with poor critical reception and was accused of minimizing the political issues of the day.

Grass again stirred controversy with the release of his 2006 memoir *Peeling the Onion*, in which he revealed that he had been a member of the Waffen-SS during World War II.

### Works in Literary Context

Though he has been praised by critics for his insistence on coming to terms with Germany's past, Grass was awaited by a new period of controversy in the twenty-first century. In a 2006 interview about *Peeling the Onion*, Grass revealed his past as a member of the Waffen-SS. This revelation was a huge shock for Grass's fans and admirers, who had assumed he was part of the generation of people too young to have played a relevant part during World War II. Grass was slammed in the press for his failure to disclose his past and was accused of hypocrisy and cowardice. In September 2006, a variety of authors, poets, and intellectuals stood in solidarity with Grass, praising his work and his contribution to German literature.

To date, Grass still faces questions and controversy over his SS past. Though Grass's past has partially overshadowed his longtime career as the upholder of Germans' moral compass, his body of work is more complicated. Ambitious, confused, and often confusing, it embodies the struggles of Germans to come to terms with their checkered past and their current reality.

**Magic Realism** Best known for his bizarre and immense novel *The Tin Drum*, Günter Grass has become a key figure in the European tradition of magic realism. The story grapples with the origins of World War II, the war itself, and the economic miracle that transformed Germany from downtrodden nation to world power in a matter of years. Reaction to *The Tin Drum*, which was an immediate best seller in Germany and abroad, ranged from critical acclaim to moral outrage. For example, the book won a prestigious literary prize from the city of Bremen, but the prize was withheld by the city senate on moral grounds.

Magic realism is not limited to German authors like Grass; in fact, it is a literary style practiced worldwide by writers like Gabriel García Márquez, Italo Calvino, and

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Grass's famous contemporaries include:

**Vladimir Nabokov** (1899–1977): Russian American novelist known for his controversial work *Lolita*.

**Boris Yeltsin** (1931–2007): First president of post-Communist Russia.

**James Dewey Watson** (1928–): Molecular biologist and codiscoverer of the structure of DNA.

**Alfred Hitchcock** (1899–1980): Movie director known for his thrillers and suspense films.

**Madeleine Albright** (1937–): First female U.S. secretary of state.

**Anne Frank** (1929–1945): Dutch writer who penned her famous *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* while she hid from the Nazis in Amsterdam.

Salman Rushdie, all of whom have been influenced by Grass in some form.

**Depicting Germany** Grass's work, while touching on broad political movements like socialism and Nazism, is distinctly German and reflects the concerns of postwar Germany. Destroyed by war and a morally bankrupt state, postwar Germans faced a "stunde Null" (zero hour) in which their society was literally forced to begin from ground zero—new currency, new government, new philosophies. The struggle to come to terms with Germany's violent past has been echoed in the works of Grass's literary contemporaries, such as Heinrich Böll, Christa Wolf, and filmmakers like Werner Herzog and Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

### Works in Critical Context

Though Günter Grass's work has been viewed through the lens of controversy with recent revelations of his Nazi military past, his contribution to postwar German literature is undisputed. As the recipient of some of the most prestigious awards in literature and a central figure of modern German culture, Grass has taken on a role of national conscience despite his uneven reception from critics.

**The Tin Drum** Even before the publication of his most famous work, *The Tin Drum*, Grass received recognition for his literary talent. Gruppe 47 awarded him their coveted prize in 1958, allowing him to complete work on the novel. International response to *The Tin Drum* was immediate and overwhelming. Shortly before the book appeared in the United States, *Time* magazine pronounced it "the most spectacular example" of recent German literature, praising Grass as "probably the most inventive talent to be heard from anywhere since the war." Within Germany, criticism was mixed; Grass's unflinching portrait of madness and immorality struck a

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Grass's novels are enhanced by his use of magic realist elements. Here are other famous works of magic realism:

*One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), a novel by Gabriel García Márquez. This acclaimed novel tells the story of a one-hundred-year period in the history of the fictional Latin American town of Macondo.

*Big Fish* (2003), a film directed by Tim Burton. In Burton's film, based on the novel by Daniel Wallace, an old Southern man's life story takes on mythic proportions.

*The Life of Pi* (2001), a novel by Yann Martel. This award-winning novel tells the unusual story of a shipwrecked boy trapped for months on a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger.

chord with reviewers, some of whom praised Grass's genius; others condemned Grass's portrait of Germany as obscene and blasphemous.

**Local Anesthetic** Grass's exploration of radical politics in *Local Anesthetic* was poorly received. The book, which involves a student's plot to set a professor's dog on fire to exhibit the futility of war, was seen as treating too lightly the concerns of the student movement and political radicals. Critics complained that Grass had made his point before and that his work was offensively dismissive; though some American critics praised the book, it was considered to be a popular flop.

**My Century** *My Century*, Grass's ambitious episodic work about the twentieth century, met with a similarly mixed reception. Some German critics complained that Grass failed to look directly at the perpetrators of atrocities such as the Holocaust; others, such as *New York Times* book reviewer Peter Gay, noted that Grass's attempt to address such a broad subject matter "fail[ed] to cohere."

### Responses to Literature

1. Günter Grass added magic realist elements to his retelling of the horrors of World War II. Compare this technique to the documentary style of narrative favored in books like *Schindler's List* or *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. What are the benefits of a magic realist approach? What are the limitations?
2. The Free City of Danzig, now known as Gdansk, Poland, plays a central role in Grass's novels. Using your library and the Internet, write a brief report on the significance of Danzig in German history during the twentieth century.
3. In his later years, Grass's past as a Waffen-SS member was revealed to great public controversy. Do you feel that Grass's service in this elite Nazi military branch

affects the significance of his body of work? Why do you think he did not reveal this part of his history earlier? If you were Grass, would you have revealed your past or kept it private?

4. In books like *The Tin Drum* and *Cat and Mouse*, Grass uses humor and parody to deal with the atrocities of war. Can you think of other examples of humor in books about death or war? Is the use of humor or parody in this context out of place, considering the atrocities committed during wartime?
5. Grass's work can be compared to that of Kurt Vonnegut, an American writer who used elements of magic realism in his own writing about World War II. Using your library and the Internet, write a brief biographical study of Kurt Vonnegut and compare his work to that of Grass. How are their writing styles different and how are their perspectives on their own histories different? How are those differences present in their works?

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## Robert Graves

BORN: 1895, London, England

DIED: 1985, Majorca, Spain

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

*Good-Bye to All That* (1929)

*I, Claudius* (1934)





Robert Graves Graves, Robert, photograph. AP Images.

## Overview

Robert Graves is considered one of the most distinctive and lyrical voices in twentieth-century English poetry. Openly dismissive of contemporary poetic fashions and precepts, Graves developed his own poetic theory, principally inspired by ancient mythology and folklore. Although Graves regarded himself as a poet first, he was widely respected for his prose works. He is best known for his World War I autobiography *Good-Bye to All That* (1929) and for his novel *I, Claudius* (1934).

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Family and World War I** Robert von Ranke Graves was born in Wimbledon, England, on July 24, 1895, to Alfred Perceval Graves and his second wife, Amalie (Amy) Elizabeth Sophie von Ranke Graves. His father was an Irish poet, and his mother was a relation of Leopold von Ranke, one of the founding fathers of modern historical studies. Graves won a scholarship to Oxford University in 1913.

Graves left school at the outbreak of World War I and promptly enlisted for military service. World War I began in eastern Europe when the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated in Serbia by a Bosnian terrorist. Subsequent diplomacy failed, and entangling alliances led to war, which soon engulfed nearly the whole of Europe. Great Britain was allied with France and Russia, and, when it entered the war in 1917, the United States, against Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey. Graves was sent to France where trench warfare was commonplace. He saw extensive military action and was injured in the Somme offensive in 1916, one of the biggest battles in the war, with 1.5 million casualties.

**Poetry and *Good-Bye to All That*** While convalescing from war injuries, Graves wrote two volumes of poetry: *Over the Brazier* (1916) and *Fairies and Fusiliers* (1918). These poems earned him the reputation as an accomplished “war poet” like fellow war poet Siegfried Sassoon. While still in the army, Graves married and moved to Oxford to begin his university studies. Although Graves failed to finish his degree, he wrote a postgraduate thesis that enabled him to teach English at Cairo University in Egypt.

In 1929, he published *Good-Bye to All That*, an autobiography that was considered to be one of the best firsthand accounts of World War I. That same year, Graves left his wife for the American poet Laura Riding, who had considerable influence on his poetic development, and moved with her to Majorca, Spain. In Graves’s second volume of collected poems, *Poems, 1926–1930*, his previous idealized sentimentality is replaced by intensely personal and sad poems that explore the possibilities of salvation and loss through love.

**More War and Personal Loss** The Spanish Civil War (a conflict that began in 1936 between republican and nationalist forces for political and military control of the country) forced Graves and Riding to leave Majorca in 1939. They traveled to the United States, where Riding became involved with and eventually married an American poet, Schuyler Jackson. Distraught, Graves returned to England and began a relationship with Beryl Hodge.

In the 1940s, after his break with Riding, Graves formulated his personal mythology of the White Goddess, inspired by late nineteenth-century studies of female-headed societies and goddess cults. *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (1948) is Graves’s search for his muse through the mythology of Europe.

**Historical Novels** In the 1930s and 1940s, Graves supported himself financially by writing historical novels that earned him both popular and critical acclaim. His most memorable works of fiction are the popular historical novels *I, Claudius* (1934) and *Claudius the God and His Wife Messalina* (1934). These works document the political intrigue and moral corruption of the Roman Empire’s waning years in terms that suggest parallels with twentieth-century civilization. In *Count Belisarius* (1938), Graves displays his knowledge of the early Middle

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Graves's famous contemporaries include:

**Harold Gillies** (1882–1960): New Zealander surgeon and one of the founders of reconstructive, or plastic, surgery. He developed his techniques by providing facial repairs to injured soldiers during World Wars I and II.

**Margaret Mitchell** (1900–1949): American writer and author of *Gone with the Wind* (1936), a historical romance set during the American Civil War and Reconstruction period. The novel won the Pulitzer Prize for Literature in 1937.

**Wilfred Owen** (1893–1918): British poet, killed in action one week before the end of World War I; well-known for his bitter war poems "Anthem for Doomed Youth" (1917) and the posthumously published "Dulce et Decorum Est" (1920).

**Pablo Picasso** (1881–1973): Spanish artist who helped create the cubist movement. His famous painting *Guernica* (1937) expresses his anguish over the bombing of the Spanish town of Guernica by the Nazis during the Spanish Civil War.

**Siegfried Sassoon** (1886–1967): English poet and novelist and friend of Graves during World War I. His poetry depicts the brutality of war rather than a more "patriotic," idealized view.

Ages, while in *Sergeant Lamb of the Ninth* (1940) and *Proceed, Sergeant Lamb* (1940), he demonstrates his understanding of military tactics through his depiction of a British soldier at the time of the American Revolution.

In *The Story of Marie Powell: Wife to Mr. Milton* (1943), Graves attempts to debunk John Milton's reputation as a great poet by viewing him through the eyes of his first wife, who is portrayed as Milton's intellectual equal. *The Golden Fleece* (1944) is a retelling of the legend of Jason and the Argonauts and is notable for its inclusion of poems and mythology informed by the White Goddess. *King Jesus* (1946) is a controversial novel in which Graves postulates that Jesus Christ survived the crucifixion. In *Watch the North Wind Rise* (1949), Graves presents a futuristic utopia that worships a goddess and follows customary rituals.

From 1961 to 1966, Graves lectured periodically at Oxford University in his capacity as professor of poetry, and in 1968 he received the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry. Throughout his career he published and revised numerous editions of his *Collected Poems*, and continued to publish original collections through the 1970s, including *Timeless Meeting* (1973). Graves died in Majorca in 1985 at the age of ninety.

## Works in Literary Context

Graves writes in a traditional style—he employs short-line verse structure and idiosyncratic meters; however, the content of his work is filled with ironies, combining humor with emotional intensity. Graves's early volumes of poetry, like those of his contemporaries, deal with natural beauty and country pleasures in addition to the consequences of World War I. Because of his experiences in World War I, Graves had a lifelong preoccupation with the subject of war.

**War Theme and Influence** Neither *Good-Bye to All That* nor his war poems minimize the traumatic effect that the war had on Graves, but they avoid the nostalgia and bitterness of many contemporary works dealing with similar experiences. Paul Fussell sees *Good-Bye to All That* as less memoir than comedy of manners, following in the tradition of Elizabethan playwright Ben Jonson. The ironic and farcical elements of Graves's treatment of war, Fussell argues, had a strong influence on both English writer Evelyn Waugh and American writer Joseph Heller.

**Poetic Muse** In the 1940s, Graves formulated his personal mythology of the White Goddess. Inspired by late nineteenth-century studies of matriarchal societies and goddess cults, Graves asserts in *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (1948) that "the true poet" receives inspiration from a female Muse, "the cruel, capricious, incontinent White Goddess," and seeks to be destroyed by her. Central to this mythology is the ancient Near Eastern story of Attis, the mortal male who becomes the consort of the goddess Cybele after she has driven him to madness and suicide. The yearly death and resurrection of Attis is a metaphor of the natural seasonal cycle to which Graves alludes in such poems as "To Juan at the Winter Solstice," "Theseus and Ariadne," and "The Sirens' Welcome to Cronos." Randall Jarrell has written of these poems that they "are different from anything else in English; their whole meaning and texture and motion are different from anything we could have expected from Graves or from anybody else."

For Graves, it was much more than that. He became the Goddess's acolyte and devotee, her high priest. In poet Alistair Reid's words, "Only he could interpret her wishes, her commands." Writing *The White Goddess* gave order to Graves's deepest convictions and restored a sanctity to poetry he felt had been lost by rejecting myth for reason. She was also his muse, and his devotion to her was such that much of his last work from the 1960s on was given over to love poetry, inspired at the moment by whichever young woman had stepped into the muse role (there were at least four).

## Works in Critical Context

Robert Graves has a secure reputation as a prose writer. *Good-Bye to All That* is considered one of the finest books to come out of World War I, and many commentators

praise the imaginative re-creation of imperial Rome in *I, Claudius*.

**Poetry** Graves wished to be remembered as a poet. Critics acknowledge his technical mastery and lyrical intensity, but there is a divergence of opinion. Many have claimed that the work of poets such as W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot, whom Graves dismissed, is more enduring and memorable than that of Graves. Other critics, however, have argued that Graves's independence from twentieth-century trends had a lasting impact on younger English poets. In 1962, W. H. Auden went as far as to assert that Graves was England's "greatest living poet."

Having founded no school and with few direct disciples, Graves, through his mythologically inspired love poetry, occupies a unique position among twentieth-century poets writing in English. As scholar John Carey wrote in Graves's obituary, "He had a mind like an alchemist's laboratory: everything that got into it came out new, weird and gleaming."

Seconding Carey's view of Graves's importance as a poet, Randall Jarrell, in *The Third Book of Criticism*, concludes that "Graves is a poet of varied and consistent excellence. He has written scores, almost hundreds, of poems that are completely realized, different from one another or from the poems of any other poet. His poems have to an extraordinary degree the feeling of one man's world."

## Responses to Literature

1. After reading *Good-Bye to All That*, write a brief analysis commenting on Graves's tone. Describe your emotions toward his war experiences in a paper.
2. Read several of Graves's poems about war. Hold a class discussion stating whether the images and themes are relevant today. Would a soldier today hold the same views as Graves? Why or why not?
3. Graves is known for historical novels. Think of a period in history or a specific historical event that interests you and write two or three paragraphs about how you could develop the event into a historical novel. Whose point of view would you take?
4. Using your library's resources and the Internet, research the mythic figure of the White Goddess, then read Graves's poem by the same name. Hold a group discussion as to why you think Graves devoted an entire book to his own mythology of the White Goddess.

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## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

War has been a common theme in literature throughout time. Here are some works that address various aspects of the war experience:

*All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), a novel by Erich Maria Remarque. This novel, based on the author's own experience, tells of the German soldiers' experiences during World War I and their difficulty reintegrating into society after the war.

*The Bridges at Toko-Ri* (1953), a novel by James Michener. This novel, which follows a group of American fighter pilots in the Korean War, is based on a true story.

*Iliad* (c. ninth or eighth century B.C.E.), an epic poem by Homer. This Greek epic poem tells of events during the tenth and last year of the Trojan War, between the Greeks and the Trojans.

*The Return of the Soldier* (1918), a novel by Rebecca West. This novel tells the story of a British soldier suffering from what was then known as "shell shock" (today called post-traumatic stress disorder) and his struggles to return to civilian society after World War I.

*Under Fire* (1917), a novel by Henri Barbusse. Written by a soldier and based on his own experiences in World War I, this novel was published during the war and was one of the first war novels. It tells of French soldiers fighting the Germans in occupied France.

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## Thomas Gray

BORN: 1716, London, England

DIED: 1771, Cambridge, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

"Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College"  
(1747)

"Ode on the Spring" (1748)

"Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"  
(1751)

*Essays and Criticism* (1911)

### Overview

Thomas Gray is generally regarded as a transitional figure in eighteenth-century poetry, providing a bridge between



Thomas Gray Gray, Thomas, photograph. The Library of Congress.

the poetic sensibility of his own generation and the Romantic revolution of the future. He combines in a unique way a classic perfection of form typical of the Augustan era with subject matter and attitudes that are clearly Romantic and that anticipate still later developments. Gray's special gift for precise and memorable language was the result of rigid discipline in long years of studying Greek and Roman literature. Steeped as he was in the past, in his ideas and emotions Gray looked to the future.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***A "Proper" Education to Escape the Horrors of Home Life*** Thomas Gray was born on December 26, 1716, in London, England. Although his family was fairly prosperous, Gray's father was a morose and violent man who at times abused his wife unmercifully. There is uncertainty as to whether Gray's parents separated, but it is well documented that it was arranged for Gray to attend Eton College when he was eight years old so that he could be properly educated. A studious and solitary boy, Gray formed intimate friendships with only three other students: Thomas Ashton, Horace Walpole, and Richard West. They proclaimed themselves the "Quadruple Alliance" and were given to precocious conversation on life and literature. West and Walpole figured significantly in Gray's literary development and later in his poetic career, which blossomed during Gray's four years at Cambridge University. While at Cambridge, Gray attracted attention as an accomplished writer of Latin verse, though he left in 1738 without taking a degree. Shortly thereafter, Gray joined Walpole on an extended tour of Europe, but in 1741 they quarreled violently, the cause of their differences still a matter of speculation, and the two parted company until their reconciliation in 1745. In November 1741, Gray's father died; Gray's extant letters contain no mention of this event.

***The Loss of a Dear Friend*** Except for his mother, Richard West was the person most dear to Gray, and his death from tuberculosis (a common, deadly disease in Europe throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) on June 1, 1742, was a grievous loss to the young poet. West died in the year of Gray's greatest productivity, though not all of the work of that year was inspired either by West's death or by Gray's anticipation of it.

Gray's "Ode on the Spring" was written while West was still alive and is to some extent a response to the ode he had sent Gray on May 5, 1742. Gray's "Ode on the Spring" was sent to West at just about the time of his death and was returned unopened. The ode takes the implicit form of elegy, displacing spring from the context of renewal to that of death, and is consistent with a May

27, 1742, letter to West in which Gray explains that he is the frequent victim of “a white Melancholy”

**From Bard to Professor** Gray’s mother died on March 11, 1753, shortly after Gray had begun his famous *Pindaric Odes*, which were published by his friend Horace Walpole in a slim volume in 1757 and were received by a less than appreciative public. When the poet laureate, Colley Cibber, died, also in 1757, Gray was offered the position, but he declined it on the basis that it had become a meaningless post. From this point on, Gray wrote little more poetry, and, in July 1759, he moved to London to study at the British Museum, which had been opened to the public in January. In December 1761, he returned to Cambridge; except for frequent trips to London, other parts of England, Scotland, and Wales, he remained in Cambridge for the rest of his life. This was the period of the Seven Years War (1756–1763) between France, England, and nearly all the other major colonial powers of the time. Although he did not respond directly to these world events in his poetry, Gray’s “The Bard” may perhaps be understood as an obliquely patriotic commentary, focusing as it does on the final English conquest of Wales.

In July 1768, Gray was made professor of modern history at Cambridge, though he never actually lectured or published on the subject, focusing his scholarly efforts rather on antiquity and natural history. Meanwhile, modern history was taking place in the colonies, as the British East India Company conquered more and more of India in the name of the Crown, and the settlers in America grew increasingly restless under British rule. The most significant event of Gray’s last years, however, was personal: it was his brief, intense friendship with a young Swiss student, Karl Victor von Bonstetten. The friendship was apparently complicated by physical desire on Gray’s part, though many scholars concur that the two had no actual sexual relations. In July 1771, Gray became ill while dining at Pembroke College in Cambridge; a week later, on July 30, he died.

### Works in Literary Context

Gray remains an important poet in the context of a less than striking era for poetry during the latter half of the eighteenth century. In this sense he is one of a group, including William Collins, James Macpherson, Thomas Chatterton, William Cowper, Christopher Smart, and Joseph and Thomas Warton, who largely failed to provide English poetry with a distinctive period identity, and whose achievements were shortly to be overshadowed by the emergence in the 1780s and 1790s of William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and the quickly succeeding second generation of Romantic writers.

**Sexual Desire and Castration** Gray’s poetry is frequently concerned with the rejection of sexual desire. The figure of the poet in his poems is often a lonely, alienated, and marginal one, and various muses or

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Gray’s famous contemporaries include:

**James Wolfe** (1727–1759): Respected by his men, noted for his generalship, Wolfe achieved lasting fame after his victory over the French outside Quebec secured Canada for Britain in the French and Indian War. He recited Gray’s “Elegy” to his men the day before the assault on Quebec.

**John Dyer** (1699–1757): A Welsh pastoral poet best known for writing “Grongar Hill” and “The Fleece.”

**Samuel Johnson** (1709–1784): A British essayist, biographer, lexicographer, and critic, Johnson is the most-quoted English writer after Shakespeare. He is best known for his aphorisms, prose style, and great wit.

**Benjamin Franklin** (1706–1790): One of the Founding Fathers of the United States, Franklin was also a noted scientist, writer, diplomat, and inventor. Around the time of Gray’s writing, Franklin was conducting his famous experiments with electricity.

**Georg Friedrich Handel** (1685–1759): A Prussian composer of astonishing vigor, through his *Messiah* and other works, Handel was an important influence on such later artists as Mozart and Beethoven.

surrogate-mother figures are invoked—in a manner somewhat anticipatory of John Keats’s employment of similar figures—for aid or guidance.

One of Gray’s typical “plots” has to do with engaging some figure of desire in order to reject it, as in the “Ode on the Spring,” or, as in the “Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College,” to lament lost innocence. Sometimes, as in the “Hymn to Adversity,” a harsh and repressive figure is conjured to reject excessive desire and to aid in the formation of a modest friendship, the socially acceptable substitute of sexual desire. In the “Hymn to Ignorance,” a goddess is used to rebuke the “I” who longs for her maternal and demonic presence.

Such figures indicate a radical sexual distress. Though one might argue that the reduction of humanity to insect life in the “Ode on the Spring” is a significant form of sexual loss, in the “Hymn to Adversity,” Gray has arrived at the first clear symbolism of castration. The threat of castration is transposed into an acceptance of it. That is, the threatening figure of Adversity is pacified but requires a surrender of sexual identity.

**Reverberations Greater than Their Source** The longer ode on “The Progress of Poesy” finds Gray tracing the evolution of the power of verbal harmony from Greece to Rome to England, with eloquent passages on William Shakespeare, John Milton, and John Dryden. It



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of the keys to the success of Gray's "Elegy" lies in the universal themes it touches upon: death and the passage of time, as seen in the quiet splendor of overgrown ruins. Here are some other works that share these themes:

"Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13th, 1798" (1798), a poem by William Wordsworth. This melancholy meditation on the passage of time, both over the poet's own life and across the centuries, echoes the pensive nature of Gray's "Elegy."

*Ozymandias* (1818), a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley. This poem examines with the ruined monument of a once mighty ruler, now long dead and mostly forgotten.

*Sunset Boulevard* (1950), a film directed by Billy Wilder. This classic American film presents a dark vision of a person who refuses to yield to the passage of time. An aging silent movie actress inhabits a ruined mansion living amid mementos of her former glory. A down-on-his-luck screenwriter becomes her companion.

was from this progress that Gray would draw his chief influences.

Although his poetic canon is small—throughout his lifetime he wrote around one thousand lines of verse—Gray was a major transitional figure between the sensibility and classical perfection of the Augustans and the emotional reverberation of the Romantics. While the influence of the Augustans is manifested in Gray's concentration on complicated metrical schemes and intellectual ideals, he is appropriately seen as a precursor to the Romantic movement because of his sensitive and empathetic portrayal of the common man. Nowhere is this more evident than in his "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751), Gray's most famous work and one of the most beloved poems in English literature. While Gray wrote a number of odes, among them "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" (1747) and "Ode on the Spring" (1748), it is the diction of the "Elegy" that has infused modern language more than any other piece of English literature that contains so few consecutive lines. Alfred, Lord Tennyson recapitulates the "Elegy"'s universal appeal by declaring that it contains "divine truths that make us weep."

***A Style Bound to Be Remembered*** The same combination of classic form and emotional attitudes is observable in Gray's fine odes. The "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" evokes a nostalgic picture of the care-free life of college boys and grim forebodings of their adult futures. The poem may suffer somewhat for mod-

ern readers from excessively "poetic" diction and rather wooden abstractions, but it is redeemed (though to a lesser extent than the "Elegy") by some unforgettable phrasing. Lines such as the following, on schoolboys escaping on adventurous rambles, "They hear a voice in every wind, / And snatch a fearful joy," or the famous closing thought, "where ignorance is bliss, / 'Tis folly to be wise," distill the special magic of Gray's style at its best.

### Works in Critical Context

"Gray wrote at the very beginning of a certain literary epoch of which we, perhaps, stand at the very end," wrote famed literary critic G. K. Chesterton in 1932. "He represented that softening of the Classic which slowly turned into the Romantic."

In his *Souvenirs* (1832), Gray's young Swiss friend Bonstetten reflected on the older man: "I think the key to the mystery is that Gray never loved; the result was a poverty of heart contrasting with his ardent and profound imagination, which, instead of comprising the happiness of his life, was only its torment."

***Responses to the "Elegy"*** From the time of his first publication to the present day, Gray's poetry has had as many admirers as detractors. Although scholars continue to praise the "Elegy" as a brilliant piece of verse, they also puzzle over the inconsistencies in theme and approach that marbled the rest of Gray's poetic output. Yet critics have been almost unanimous in agreeing that in the "Elegy" Gray broke new ground in concepts and attitudes by tapping into the pulse of the common man with great insight and passion. A recent commentator, Linda Zionkowski, writes in *Men's Work: Gender, Class, and the Professionalization of Poetry, 1660–1784*, "Gray's portrayal of the isolated speaker seems to voice, and indeed validate, his own feeling of detachment from an understanding public; the 'Elegy' mystifies and personifies this alienation, transforming it from a result of commodified print to a feature of the sensitive poet's temperament." That is, not only was Gray breaking new ground, but he was trying to do so in a way that would challenge the reduction of his poetry to just another thing to be bought and sold, a commodity.

### Responses to Literature

1. Despite the fact that it was written two and a half centuries ago, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" continues to be one of the most beloved poems in the English language. What do you think accounts for its lasting popularity?
2. Gray was heavily influenced by the ancient Greek lyrical poets, such as Pindar. Study the lyricists of Greece. What were the characteristics of their poetry? How was their poetry similar to the

works of later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poets that they influenced? How was it different?

3. Like Gray did for his “Elegy,” visit a nearby cemetery. Write about one of the tombstones: who was buried there, and when? What do you think their lives were like? What does their age and the place they were buried tell you about their life?
4. Gray’s “Elegy” focused on lower-class inhabitants of a cemetery because he was purposely working against the assumption that only upper-class people were worthy of remembrance. Discuss whether you think that, in today’s society, we are more likely to remember the poor, or if we are still just as focused on the exploits of the rich and famous.

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## Graham Greene

BORN: 1904, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, England

DIED: 1991, Vevey, Switzerland

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Travel, nonfiction, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Power and the Glory* (1940)

*The Heart of the Matter* (1948)

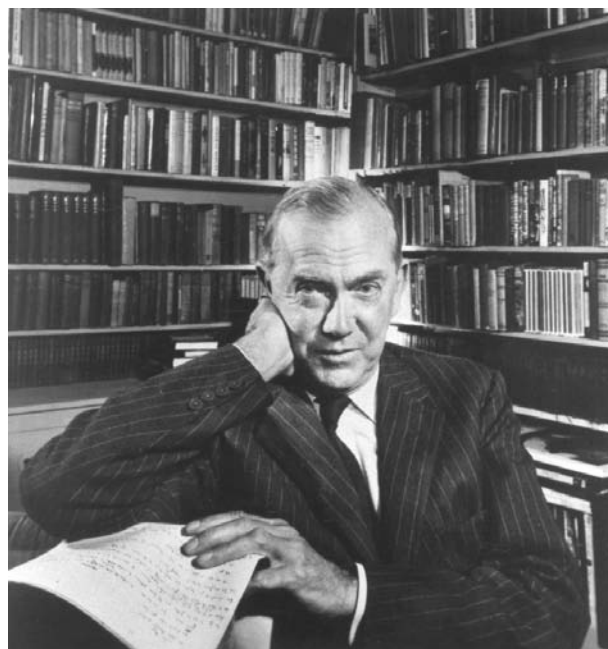
*The End of the Affair* (1951)

*The Quiet American* (1955)

*Ways of Escape* (1980)

### Overview

Graham Greene’s life and literature were played out on a global stage; he traveled widely and wrote works set in locales as disparate as Hanoi and Havana, Liberia and Lithuania, Mexico and Malaysia. His works focused on the borders and conflicts between the European world and



Graham Greene Greene, Graham, 1969, photograph. AP Images.

the “other” world abroad. During Greene’s lifetime—which spanned two world wars and the advent of the nuclear age—he documented the changes that affected both strong empires and struggling nations.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***A Restless Youth*** Born in Berkhamsted, England, in 1904, Greene as a child was a passionate reader of books. His father was headmaster of a local school, and his mother was a first cousin of noted author Robert Louis Stevenson.

Greene entered his father’s school in 1915 and left in 1921, when he was seventeen. Greene continued his education at Oxford, where he received a BA from Balliol College in 1925. His restlessness and sense of adventure, however, had already taken hold. While still a student, he made a long walking trip in Ireland, and, in the same year that he took his degree at Oxford, his first book was published: a collection of poetry, *Babbling April*, which critics saw as imitative.

Greene met his future wife, Vivien Dayrell-Brown, shortly before leaving Oxford in 1925, and he began an intense courtship that precipitated his conversion to her religion, Catholicism, a year before their marriage in 1927. This conversion proved to be more than a matter of expedience. Greene’s Catholicism deeply influenced his work. Many of his novels, including *Brighton Rock* (1938), *The Power and the Glory*, *The End of the*

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Greene's famous contemporaries include:

**Robert Graves** (1895–1985): an English poet, novelist, and scholar best known for his First World War memoir and his historical fiction.

**Ernest Hemingway** (1899–1961): an American novelist and journalist whose economical writing style had a significant influence on twentieth-century fiction.

**Evelyn Waugh** (1903–1966): an English writer best known for his satirical novels, he was widely popular with both readers and critics.

**W. H. Auden** (1907–1973): an Anglo-American poet, widely regarded as one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century because of his stylistic and technical achievements along with his engagement with moral and political issues.

**Anthony Burgess** (1917–1993): a British novelist, critic, and composer who launched his career with novels exploring the dying days of the British Empire.

**Fidel Castro** (1926–): Castro led the Cuban Revolution and ruled the country from 1959 until 2008.

**Orson Welles** (1915–1985): an American director, writer, actor, and producer. His film *Citizen Kane*, which won two Academy Awards, is widely considered one of the best films ever made.

*Affair* (1951), and others, center around religious faith and morality.

**Writer and Spy** Greene held jobs at the British American Tobacco Company and the *Nottingham Journal* (both of which he found tedious) before landing a subeditor's position at the *Times* of London. At the *Times* he advanced steadily from 1926 until the success of his first novel in 1929, at which point he became a full-time writer. Greene also wrote film criticism for *Night and Day* and the *Spectator* in the 1930s.

Greene went to Mexico in the late winter of 1937–1938. He had been commissioned by a London publishing house, Longmans, Green, to study the plight of the Mexican Catholic Church, which had for over a decade been engaged in a running feud with the revolutionary government—the government having decided to enforce a clause in the revolutionary constitution that would prevent clergymen from voting or commenting on public affairs. His experiences in Mexico inspired one of his greatest novels, *The Power and the Glory*. Then, during World War II, Greene again found himself in the thick of things, if also on the periphery; he worked several months with the Ministry of Information and later served with

the British Foreign Office in Sierra Leone and Nigeria, experiences that inform his spy thrillers and adventure stories, including the 1948 novel *The Heart of the Matter*.

**Success in Print and on Screen** Greene and his wife permanently separated in 1947 after she discovered he had a mistress, an American woman named Catherine Walston. Though his private life was troubled, Greene's career was taking flight. He wrote the screenplay for director Orson Welles's classic film noir *The Third Man*, which won the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival in 1949. Greene's affair with Walston inspired his 1950 novel *The End of the Affair* (in fact, the novel was dedicated to her). This acclaimed work was adapted for film in 1955 and again in 1999.

**Prescient Novels of International Intrigue** World travel was an integral part of Greene's life and work. His impressions and experiences during his trips, recorded in his nonfiction, contributed to the authenticity of detail and setting in his novels. Greene traveled to Cuba, the Belgian Congo, Russia, Brazil, Tunisia, Romania, East Germany, and Haiti.

Greene's increasingly international political enthusiasms provided the background to many of his postwar novels, from *The Quiet American* (1955), set in Vietnam, to *The Human Factor* (1978), which explains Cold War espionage. *The Quiet American*, in particular, offers a realistic picture of how American involvement in the French war to retain control over what was at the time the French colony of Indochina (and what is now called Vietnam) might eventually lead to a full-scale American military commitment in the region. Indeed it did: within ten years America found itself increasingly involved in what became the Vietnam War.

Greene's 1958 novel *Our Man in Havana* is a comic spy story about British intelligence agents working to uncover information on a secret Cuban military installation. The novel seems in some ways to predict the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

**A Citizen of the World Dies in Switzerland** In the 1960s and 1970s Greene's popularity continued to grow with the success of such works of fiction as *The Comedians* (1966), *Travels with My Aunt: A Novel* (1969), and *The Honorary Consul* (1973). Although he also produced two volumes of memoirs, *A Sort of Life* in 1971 and *Ways of Escape* in 1980, Greene undertook no further travel narratives as such, but he did write one extended "biography-travel book escapist yarn memoir," as J. D. Reed, the reviewer for *Time* magazine, jokingly called it. Published in 1984, *Getting to Know the General*, Greene's account of his friendship with Panamanian strongman Omar Torrijos, once again took Greene to the borderland between privilege and squalor, and idealism and cynicism that he had encountered in West Africa and Mexico.

Greene died in Vevey, Switzerland, on April 3, 1991.

## Works in Literary Context

Greene's work is as paradoxical as the man himself. He is repeatedly ranked among the great serious novelists of the twentieth century, yet his books have had enormous success in mass culture as well. He is one of the twentieth-century novelists most frequently and successfully adapted for film. Yet, in spite of its modern cinematic nature, his prose owes virtually nothing to the modern and the experimental, and in fact has more in common with the best nineteenth-century models. Greene more than any modern writer has mixed genres, so that his "entertainments" often seem relatively serious and his religious and political books sometimes resemble spy or mystery stories.

***The Thoughtful Thriller*** Greene frequently wrote what might be termed "thoughtful thrillers." While *The Quiet American*, *The Heart of the Matter*, and *The Human Factor* are all gripping in their various ways, they also are all thought-provoking, prompting readers to consider more deeply the meanings and dynamics of international politics, and the intersections between the personal and the political. The reader of Greene's political thrillers may leave satisfied that the roller-coaster of espionage and drama has arrived at a safe conclusion (sometimes), but he or she also leaves more concerned than ever about the state of the world itself. What, Greene challenges us to ask long after we have put down the book, is *really* going on—around us and within us?

## Works in Critical Context

Critical response to Greene's novels has been favorable, with several exceptions. Some critics fault Greene's prose style for not developing beyond straightforward journalism, for avoiding the experimental modes of twentieth-century literature. Other naysayers argue that Greene's characters are little more than two-dimensional vehicles for Greene's Catholic ideology. Most commentators, however, would agree with Richard Hoggart's assessment: "In Greene's novels we do not 'explore experience'; we meet Graham Greene. We enter continual reservations about what is being done to experience, but we find the novels up to a point arresting because they are forceful, melodramatic presentations of an obsessed and imaginative personality." When he died in 1991, Greene was eulogized widely as one of the most important novelists of the twentieth century.

***The Quiet American*** Responses to *The Quiet American* have frequently focused on the 1958 Joseph Mankiewicz film adaptation, an important cinematic effort, but also limited because Cold War politics had prevented the filmmaker from fully following Greene's critical attitudes toward United States involvement in Vietnam. For instance, Kevin Lewis notes that "although the 1958 film is artistically compromised, full of evasions and half-

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Greene's protagonists typically struggle to emerge from the darkness of human suffering into the light of redemption. This redemption is usually preceded by an instance of *felix culpa*—the "fortunate fall" that strips the characters of human pride, enabling them to perceive God's grace. Here are some other works that consider the theme of the fortunate fall:

*Paradise Lost* (1667), an epic poem by John Milton. This work, Milton's effort to "justify the works of God to man," retells the biblical story of Adam and Eve's temptation by Satan and subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

*The Marble Faun* (1860), a novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne. This novel is an unusual romance that explores the idea of guilt and the Fall of Man by focusing on the transformations of four characters living in Italy.

*The Fortunate Fall* (1996), a science-fiction novel by Raphael Carter. This novel deals with the consequences of a highly computerized and networked society.

truths, it is fascinating as a barometer of liberal American political opinion during the height of the Cold War." In a similar vein, film critic Paula Willoquet-Maricondi considers the film adaptation's influence on later Hollywood treatments of Vietnam, suggesting that in Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), for example, "We are taken back to the origins of American involvement in Vietnam evoked in *The Quiet American* and thus to the myths that motivated that involvement." For all that, some critics do still focus their attentions on the book itself—even then, though, the tendency is to treat it as a sort of history-prophecy combination, even more than as a piece of literature. In the words of Peter McInerny, "Readers have recognized that the novel is a visionary or proleptic history of what would happen to Americans in Vietnam. 'He had always understood what was going to happen there,' Gloria Emerson writes in her account of an interview with Greene, 'and in that small and quiet novel, told us nearly everything.'"

Whatever his ultimate ranking as an artist, Greene will surely be remembered as one of the most articulate spokesmen of his time. Greene has called his method journalistic, but he has been a journalist of political motive and religious doubt, of alienation and commitment, recording the lives of both the underground agent and the teenage tough. His work, a history of our paradoxical and turbulent times, fathers the principle of moral uncertainty that underlies so much of modern spy and political fiction: the individual in conflict with himself.

## Responses to Literature

1. Greene explored the borders between the European world and the world of its former colonies, exploring realms that had been brought closer together during his lifetime. With the Internet and e-mail, these worlds are even closer today, and travel to distant locations can be accomplished while maintaining much greater contact with the world back home. Do you think the kinds of experiences Greene's characters had would be different in today's world? Are the kinds of novels and travel books that Greene wrote a relic of the past, or is there a place for this kind of writing in today's world?
2. Greene has been criticized for using his writings to further Catholic ideology. Does Catholicism play a central role in his works? If so, does it make them less or more worthy of study and reflection, or does it have no effect? Why?
3. Greene wrote about the modern world in prose that was neither modern nor experimental and has been likened to the style of nineteenth-century writers. What are the strengths of this choice of prose style, and what aspects of modern life was Greene unable to convey adequately because he chose to use a style borrowed from a previous century?
4. Much of Greene's work was based on his personal travels to exotic and faraway lands, but he was also able to turn his journeys closer to home into widely read travel essays. Write an essay about one of your own journeys, even one that did not take you far from home.

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## Nicolás Guillén

BORN: 1902, Camaguey, Cuba

DIED: 1989, Havana, Cuba

NATIONALITY: Cuban

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Motifs of Son* (1930)

*Songoro Cosongo* (1931)

*West Indies Ltd.* (1934)

*The Dove of Popular Flight* (1958)

*I Have* (1964)

## Overview

Nicolás Guillén was a significant Latin American poet of the twentieth century. He was one of the first writers to affirm and celebrate the black Cuban (or Afro-Cuban) experience, beginning with his celebrated and controversial *Motifs of Son* (1930). Guillén chronicled the turbulent history of his native land from a Marxist perspective, addressing what he perceived to be the injustices of imperialism, capitalism, and racism. He came to be regarded as Cuba's national poet, and was recognized as such by the nation's leader, Fidel Castro, in 1961. His work as an essayist and journalist also won him acclaim.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Political Beginnings** Nicolás Cristóbal Guillén was born in Camaguey, Cuba, on July 10, 1902—just seven weeks after Cuba achieved its independence from Spain. He was the eldest of six children; his parents were both of mixed African and Spanish ancestry. His father, a newspaper editor, senator, and leader of the Liberal Party, was assassinated by soldiers in 1917 during an electoral conflict between Liberals and Conservatives. This loss profoundly affected Guillén's political outlook and creative writing.

**The Son Cubano** Guillén began writing poems in 1916, and his work first appeared in print three years later. Printing, which he had learned as a hobby from his father, became the means by which he supported his needy family. His secondary education had to be undertaken at night. In 1920, he left the provinces to study in the University of Havana's School of Law. Soon afterward, pressing financial need forced him to return to Camaguey and to his printing work. He became a journalist and editor of the newspaper *El Camagueyano*, founded a literary journal, and participated in the city's cultural institutions.

In 1926 Guillén decided to accept again the challenge of the capital city, where, thanks to a friend of his





Nicolás Guillén (right) receiving the Stalin Peace Prize Guillén, Nicolás, photograph. AP Images.

late father, he secured a job as a typist in the Ministry of the Interior. He began writing poetry again in 1927, and was invited to contribute to a newspaper supplement highlighting the cultural achievements of Cuba's black population. This writing developed into his first important collection, *Motifs of Son* (1930).

The *son cubano*, a sensual Afro-Cuban dance rhythm, inspired Guillén to open a literary window on the reality of the black presence in Cuba. He simulated African rhythms in his verse, and he used black dialect and speech patterns. These were departures from his earlier poetic style and from European traditions that treated blacks as an exotic Other. The *son* became a vehicle to convey the indignation of Havana's poor blacks and their struggle against oppression and injustice, which connected back to slave rebellions and the previous generation's quest for national independence.

**Deepening Social Consciousness** Guillén expanded his focus in his next publication, *Songoro Cosongo* (1931). In this volume he emphasized the importance of mulatto culture in Cuban history, striving to reflect Cuba's true history and racial composition. The title is an example of the nonsense phrases Guillén uses to turn his poetry into syncopated rhythms reflecting the music of the people. *Songoro Cosongo* earned its author a worldwide reputation; many call it his masterwork.

After the fall of the corrupt government headed by Gerardo Machado in 1933 and the increasing U.S. presence in Cuba, Guillén's poetry grew overtly militant. *West Indies, Ltd.* (1934), depicts in bitterly satirical tones the cruel and exploitative history of slavery, Spanish colonialism, and American imperialism in the West Indies. The verses describe the Caribbean as a factory profitably exploited by foreign nations. In 1936, under the new regime of Fulgencio Batista, Guillén was arrested and briefly jailed with other editors of the journal *Mediodía*.

Now a Communist Party member, the poet's commitment to social change grew in 1937, when he traveled to Spain to cover the civil war for *Mediodía* and to participate in an international antifascist writers' conference. Before departing for Europe, he wrote a long elegy called *Spain: A Poem in Four Anguishes and a Hope* (1937). In another volume of poetry released that year, *Songs for Soldiers and Sonnets for Tourists*, Guillén biting satirizes both types of invasion, by soldiers and by tourists, that Cuban society was enduring.

**Exile and Revolution** Guillén spent much of the next two decades abroad, traveling around Europe and Latin America as a lecturer and journalist. His first volume available in English, *Cuba Libre* (1948), was translated by his friend, the iconic American poet Langston Hughes. After an uprising, led by Fidel Castro, was

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Guillén's famous contemporaries include:

**Jorge Luis Borges** (1899–1986): Argentine writer whose works were banned in Cuba under Castro.

**Langston Hughes** (1902–1967): American poet of the Harlem Renaissance; a friend and English translator of Guillén.

**Alejo Carpentier** (1904–1980): Cuban novelist, literary theorist, and scholar of Cuban music.

**Pablo Neruda** (1904–1973): Nobel Prize-winning Chilean poet and communist diplomat.

**Léopold Sédar Senghor** (1906–2001): Senegalese poet, developer of the theory of Negritude, and President of Senegal from 1960 to 1980.

**Fidel Castro** (1926–): Cuban revolutionary leader and head of state from 1959 to 2008.

suppressed in 1953, the Batista dictatorship denied Guillén permission to return to Cuba. He spent several years in unhappy exile in Paris. He wrote a volume of protest poems against the regime, *The Dove of Popular Flight* (1958), and a work of *Elegies* (1958) mourning the loss of friends and victims of political repression.

The triumph of the Cuban revolution in early 1959 immediately brought Guillén back to his homeland, where he enthusiastically embraced the cause. There his first public reading, at the invitation of Che Guevara, was to the recently victorious rebel soldiers. Guillén readily took on the role of poet laureate of the revolution. He helped found the Cuban National Union of Writers and Artists (UNEAC) and headed it for more than twenty-five years. His 1964 verse collection *I Have* joyfully celebrates the flight of Batista, the Cuban victory over the American-backed invasion at the Bay of Pigs, and the nation's abolition of racial and economic discrimination.

Among Guillén's later works, the most notable are *The Great Zoo* (1967), a poetic visit to a metaphorical zoo containing some of the world's curious and beautiful natural, social, and metaphysical phenomena; *Hasty Prose, 1929–1972* (1972), a three-volume collection of his journalism; and *The Daily Diary* (1972), which combines narrative, journalistic, and poetic arts in a parody of the Cuban press of times past.

In 1981, Guillén garnered Cuba's highest honor, the Order of José Martí. In his later years, he became a member of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. He died in 1989 after a long illness; the Cuban people mourned as his body lay in state in Havana's Revolution Square.

## Works in Literary Context

Guillén frequently refers to the works of other poets as sources of reinforcement and debate. Among his influences are major Spanish and Latin American poets of the nineteenth century, such as Gustavo Adolfo Becquer, Ruben Dario, and the hero of Cuba's independence movement, José Martí. Guillén's reliance on "nonsensical" phrases and imagery in his early work, and his occasional use of the ballad form, show the influence of the acclaimed Spanish poet Federico García Lorca.

**Afro-Cuban Synthesis** Nicolás Guillén strove to capture the everyday reality and social complexity of Cuba. Combining European and African elements, Guillén developed a "mulatto" or "mestizo" poetry, a Caribbean poetic mold that is musical and revolutionary. His synthesis of traditional Spanish metric forms with Afro-Cuban rhythms and folklore uniquely captures the cultural flavor of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, critics have noted. He was also credited with capturing the genuine dialect and speech patterns of Cuban blacks, which he blended with onomatopoeic African words to create a unique language in which sound replaces semantic meaning. Some poems in *Songoro Cosongo* are abstract word-paintings, carefully crafted in rhyme, meter, and tone, but with no meaning other than rhythm and symbolic suggestion.

**Love and Indignation** Themes of protest against social injustice are a constant in the writing of Guillén. In melancholy or caustically satirical tones, a pronounced indignation shines through. From his earliest work, he gave poetic voice to the lives of poverty and pathos behind the picturesque facade of Havana's black slum dwellers. He frequently invokes the historical memory of slavery, which lasted in Cuba for more than three and a half centuries. His poems, and his nonfiction, place issues of race in the context of the economic imperialism he saw as draining the lifeblood from Cuba. Guillén starkly illuminates the contradiction between harsh socioeconomic circumstances and the universal aspirations for security, solidarity, and love.

**National Institution** Two decades since his death, Guillén remains Cuba's most celebrated literary figure. Along with the Puerto Rican poet Luis Pales Matos, he was the leading practitioner of *poesia negra* ("black poetry"), which became an influential cultural genre for decades. The forthright social criticism in works such as *West Indies Ltd.* contributed to a tradition of political art and literature in Cuba that goes back to Martí. As the poetic spokesman for the Cuban revolution, and longtime leader of the writers' union, he became a venerable institution in his home country, and inspired and helped many in the younger generation.

## Works in Critical Context

With his *Motifs of Son*, Nicolás Guillén brought a burst of energy to the artistic world of Havana. “The stir these poems provoked,” literary scholar Vera Kutzinski writes, “remains unparalleled in Cuban literary history: While their reception was largely enthusiastic, some critics were also disturbed by the aesthetic and social implications of Guillén’s literary use of the *son*.” Poems like “*Negro Bembon*” (translated by Langston Hughes as “Thick-Lipped Cullud Boy”) prompted some readers to accuse Guillén of promoting negative images of black Cubans. Nevertheless, the originality and infectious musicality of his first two publications, especially *Songoro Cosongo*, brought him wide acclaim.

**Black or Red?** With *West Indies Ltd.*, the protest element in Guillén deepened and also broadened from a racial to a social dimension. Many commentators have distinguished between his early works of *poesia negra* (black poetry) and the poems he produced after converting to communism. Some critics, whom Guillén, in his *Hasty Prose*, called “urgent and hasty,” have emphasized what they call the Afro-Cuban—playful, hypnotic, or folkloric—aspects of his poetry. Such a superficial reading can give short shrift to the sociopolitical and revolutionary focus of his work. Guillén himself rejected the term “Afro-Cuban,” pointing out that the Cuban nation is in fact “Afro-Spanish.”

Contemporary scholars have begun to focus on his work’s artistic elements, his mastery of numerous poetic genres, and his commitment to revealing the authentic voice of his people. Their appreciation of Guillén has gone beyond labeling him a black poet or a political poet. According to Kutzinski, “[Guillén’s] poetic texts are engaged in the forging of a literary tradition from the many disparate elements that constitute the cultural landscape of that region.” Alfred Melon, in his contribution to *Tres ensayos sobre Nicolás Guillén* (Three Essays on Nicolás Guillén, 1980), shares this assessment, naming Guillén a “poet of synthesis.”

**A Nation’s Poet** After the 1959 revolution that brought Fidel Castro to power, Nicolás Guillén came to be regarded as Cuba’s national poet. Other countries were equally appreciative. Like Pablo Neruda, he was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize by the Soviet Union. Literary critics and fellow writers in many countries nominated him for the Nobel Prize in Literature. His poetry, much of which has been set to music, is sung and recited by people worldwide and has been translated into more than thirty languages.

## Responses to Literature

1. Using your library or the Internet, find a recording of *son cubano* music. What do you hear in the music that helps you appreciate Guillén’s *Motifs of Son*? What elements can you identify that Guillén incorporated into his work?

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Nicolás Guillén gave voice to the black contribution to Cuban life in his poetry. The following works all represent the African voice in twentieth-century poetry and popular culture.

*Drumbeats of Kinkiness and Blackness* (1937), a poetry collection by Luis Pales Matos. The most well-known volume of poetry by the acknowledged cocreator, along with Guillén, of the Latin American *negrismo* movement.

*Anthology of the New Black and Malagasy Poetry in French* (1948), a poetry anthology edited by Leopold Senghor. This collection was a breakthrough for the French-speaking *negritude* movement, founded by Senghor and Aimé Césaire in Paris.

*Black Orpheus* (1959), a film directed by Marcel Camus, from a play by Vinícius de Moraes. This Cannes Film Festival winner sets the Greek myth of Orpheus in Rio de Janeiro during the celebration known as Carnival.

*Zombie* (1977), an album by Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and Afrika 70. Fela Kuti, the Nigerian pop music star and so-called “black president,” aroused the wrath of his government with this scathing attack on the misuse of military authority.

2. Some critics thought Guillén’s Afro-Cuban poems contained words and images that demeaned black Cubans. Based on your reading, do you agree? Why or why not? Provide examples from the author’s work to support your view.
3. Compare and contrast Guillén’s early poems to the poetry of Langston Hughes, who translated Guillén’s work into English. Was Hughes similarly inspired by music?
4. After the triumph of Fidel Castro’s insurgency in 1959, Guillén went from being a revolutionary poet to a poet celebrating and defending a revolution. What differences of tone and substance do you detect between his earlier and later writing?

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# H-J

## Thomas Hardy

BORN: 1840, Dorset, England

DIED: 1928, Dorset, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886)

*Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874)

*Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891)

*Jude the Obscure* (1896)

### Overview

The works of the English novelist, poet, and dramatist Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) unite the Victorian and modern eras. His work revealed the strains that widespread industrialization and urbanization placed on traditional English life. Major social changes took place during Hardy's life. When he was a young man, England still had a largely agricultural economy and Queen Victoria presided over an ever-expanding worldwide empire. By the time he died, the forces of modernization had changed England forever.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***Early Years During a Period of Rapid Industrialization in England*** Thomas Hardy was born on June 2, 1840, in Higher Bockhampton in Dorset, England, which later would form part of the “Wessex” of his novels and poems. During his early years, Hardy witnessed the changing of his landscape and rural community brought on by the Industrial Revolution. While the Industrial Revolution had begun at the turn of the nineteenth century, it was ongoing through the beginning of the twentieth century. Populations increasingly shifted from the country to the cities. Railroads linked towns and villages that were once remote to major urban cen-

ters. And with new mobility and new economic pressure, people faced new social issues, too, including a sharp spike in prostitution rates and infamous abuses of child labor in factories and mines.

After attending local schools, Hardy was apprenticed in 1856 to John Hicks, an architect in Dorchester. During his time as apprentice architect, Hardy read many of the influential works of the era, such as Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859), which was published when Hardy was nineteen. By the time he was twenty, Hardy had abandoned religion after being convinced of the intellectual truth of a godless universe.

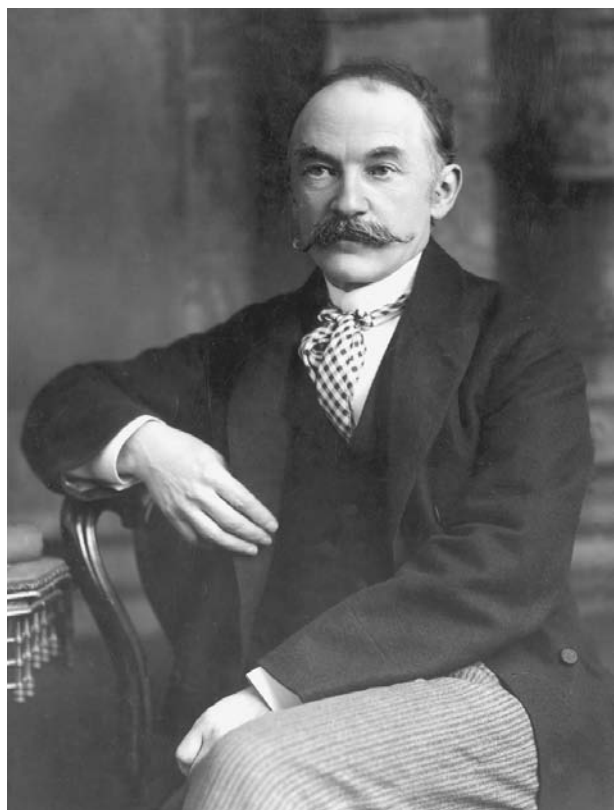
### ***Early Writing Experience: Failures, Then Success***

In 1862 Hardy began to write poems but was unable to get them published. Eventually, he accepted that he must become a novelist to succeed as an author. The novelist's profession had by this time become well paid and well regarded. Hardy wrote his first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, in 1867, but was advised not to publish it. His next novel *Desperate Remedies* (1871), was published but unsuccessful. On March 7, 1870, he met Emma Lavinia Gifford, with whom he fell in love. In spite of his continuing lack of success with literature, he decided to continue with it, hoping eventually to make enough money to enable him to marry Emma.

Hardy was paid thirty pounds for his next novel, *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872). The following year it was published in New York by Holt and Williams. The book was well received, and he was asked to write a novel for serialization in a magazine. In September 1872 *A Pair of Blue Eyes* began to appear, which records Hardy's courtship with Gifford.

*Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), also serialized, was a financial and critical success, allowing Hardy to give up architecture and marry Emma in 1874. *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876) also appeared as a serial but was not as successful. It did not have the country setting of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, which his audience had been previously responsive to. Hardy began to feel a sense of





Thomas Hardy Downey / Getty Images

discontent as a novelist because his real desire was to succeed as a poet. He preferred his poetry to his prose and considered his novels to be merely a way to earn a living.

**Mid-Career Work** His next novel, *The Return of the Native* (1878), received mixed attention. The novel's theme of the collision of Old World and New World, of rural and modern, allowed Hardy to explore his growing sense that humans are driven by impulses that are not under rational control. Some reviewers praised the graphic descriptions, but others found Hardy's writing strained and pretentious.

*The Trumpet-Major* (1880), set in the Napoleonic period, represents Hardy's attempt at historical fiction. It was followed by *A Laodicean* (1881), which Hardy dictated to his wife while he was ill. In September 1881, while that novel was still running its course, the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* invited Hardy to write a serial for his magazine. The result was *Two on a Tower* (1882).

**Later Fiction and Controversy over "Immoral" Content** During this time, Hardy decided to return to his native Dorset for good. This move initiated a major period of Hardy's creative life as a novelist. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), his next novel, presents Hardy's belief that "character is fate." Heralded as a turning point

in the writer's career, primarily for the skill with which he presents his male protagonist, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is further acclaimed as a pivotal work in the development of the English novel, demonstrating that the genre could present a significant psychological history and still serve as an important social document.

Hardy's next novel, *The Woodlanders* (1887), a traditional pastoral, actually ends on a happy note. The same cannot be said, however, for *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), in which an innocent country girl falls victim to Victorian social hypocrisy.

The *Well-Beloved* (1892) is thin by comparison. Hardy described it in a letter to his American publishers as "short and slight, and written entirely with a view to serial publication." It was followed in 1896 by what would be his final novel, *Jude the Obscure*, which follows the life and early death of Jude Fawley. More than any of Hardy's other novels, *Jude the Obscure* was met with savage critical attacks, mainly for what was perceived as immoral content. Despite the controversy it inspired immediately after publication, the novel was eventually widely translated and recognized as a masterpiece before Hardy's death.

Apart from his fourteen novels, Hardy was a prolific writer of short stories, most of which were collected in four volumes. They were written for magazine publication and are of uneven quality. Most were written in the late 1880s and early 1890s.

**Return to Poetry** After 1896, Hardy returned to his first love: poetry. Hardy the poet is best known for verses that borrow from the tradition of the ballad. *Wessex Poems* appeared in 1898. Later work encompassed everything from the monumental drama "The Dynasts" to simpler and even joyful poems celebrating nature and the moment of being, such as "The Darkling Thrush."

After declining the offer of a knighthood, in 1910 Hardy accepted the Order of Merit—the highest honor that can be accorded to an English author. Two years later his wife died. Filled with remorse over the fact that their marriage had not been better, Hardy wrote several poems about their relationship. In 1914, Hardy married again, this time to teacher and children's book author Florence Emily Dugdale, a woman forty years his junior. From 1920 to 1927, Hardy worked on his autobiography, which, when it appeared, was disguised as being the work of his wife. He died on January 11, 1928. While he requested that he be buried next to his first wife, that wish was only partly granted. Hardy's body was interred in Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey, in London, while his heart was buried in his first wife's grave.

### Works in Literary Context

Strongly identifying with the county of Dorset, Hardy saw himself as a successor to the Dorset dialect poet William Barnes, who had been a friend and mentor. Author William Rutland cites the Bible, the Romantic

poets—especially Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, and William Wordsworth—and Barnes as early influences on Hardy. Hardy also turned to the classics, reading Virgil, Horace, Catullus, Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus, whose recurring theme was “call no man happy while he lives.” In later years, scores of younger authors, including William Butler Yeats, Siegfried Sassoon, and Virginia Woolf, visited Hardy. The poet and novelist also discussed poetry with modernist poet Ezra Pound.

**Classic Tragedy** *Return of the Native* borrows the structural pattern of a Greek tragedy and follows the five-part division of a Shakespeare tragedy. The sense of place is intensified by the numerous references to local folk customs. The character of Eustacia has been compared to Emma Bovary, though Hardy claimed that he had not read Flaubert’s 1856 novel at this time.

**Shakespearean Tragedy** As with *The Return of the Native*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* invites comparisons to Shakespearean tragedy, especially *King Lear*. A parallel with the Old Testament story of Saul and David has also been suggested. The professional reviewers were disappointingly unappreciative, but three writers all praised it privately—novelists George Gissing and Robert Louis Stevenson in letters to Hardy, and poet Gerard Manley Hopkins in a letter to Robert Bridges, fellow poet and later poet laureate of England.

### Works in Critical Context

Early critics viewed Hardy as a consummate realist, while later evaluations by such critics as Albert J. Guerard suggest that he may be recognized as a predecessor of antirealist trends in twentieth-century fiction. For the integrity of his moral and philosophical views and for the imaginative achievement in creating the world of Wessex, Hardy continues to receive undiminished acclaim from critics, scholars, and the reading public.

**Far from the Madding Crowd** Author Dale Kramer calls *Far from the Madding Crowd* “the non-tragic predecessor” to Hardy’s later novels. The story ends happily, although the darker side of life is never far away. Kramer declares that this situation is based on the idea of dichotomy: “The assumption of the aesthetic in the novel is that any and all reactions to situations will be between two extremes, or on one of two extremes.” Hardy’s skill in describing the countryside, the farms, and the setting of the novel is emphasized by author Joseph W. Beach: “[W]e know by evidence of all our senses that we are dealing here with ‘substantial things.’”

**Tess of the d’Urbervilles** Critics of Hardy’s day have been joined by their modern counterparts in citing *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* as the culminating point in Hardy’s efforts at creating a modern form of tragedy. Many consider it Hardy’s greatest novel.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hardy’s famous contemporaries include:

- George Eliot** (1819–1880): Pen name of Mary Ann Evans, English novelist. Eliot was a leading realist writer.
- Émile Zola** (1840–1902): French novelist and playwright; leader of the literary school of naturalism.
- Friedrich Nietzsche** (1844–1900): German philosopher who criticized religion. Nietzsche is best known for announcing that “God is dead.”
- Paul Gauguin** (1848–1903): Leading Primitivist painter. Gauguin moved to Polynesia and painted local scenes using bold colors and simple lines.
- Olive Schreiner** (1855–1920): White South African novelist and early feminist. Schreiner lived in London in the 1880s and wrote about prostitution and birth control.

Author Byron Caminero-Santangelo writes, “During the second half of the nineteenth century, much of the British intellectual and scientific community believed that ethical and social progress was linked with the natural process of evolution. Charles Darwin, T.H. Huxley, and Herbert Spencer all believed that ethics and values could be understood and formulated using the knowledge they had of the natural, material world. . . . In *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, Hardy . . . severs the link between ethics and nature, but he hardly portrays British society as ethical, kind, or just. In *Tess*, society, technology, and law all contribute to the harshness of the ‘cosmic process.’ In particular, the novel exposes the way that a patriarchal society uses a ‘natural’ discourse to oppress women. Thus, *Tess* challenges the linking of the ethical and the natural as well as the social structures which are validated by this link.” He continues, “For Hardy, a humane ethical system could not be grounded in nature because nature itself is harsh and ‘cruel,’ and it could not be rooted in religion because he does not posit the possibility of a just deity.”

**Jude the Obscure** Of *Jude the Obscure*, author David Grylls writes, “It is true that the book’s hero tries hopelessly to harmonise the dual demands of his nature; true, too, that he is trapped between two contrasting women, spiritual Sue and fleshly Arabella. But behind this theme lies something even larger—what Hardy called ‘the tragedy of unfulfilled aims.’ *Jude the Obscure* is about the pain of disappointment—frustration, disillusion, loss.”

Grylls continues: “[T]he book also mounts an onslaught on marriage. In this it has affinities with the contemporary New Woman novels, which questioned marriage and urged ‘free union’ . . . underlying such gleefully grim ridicule is a serious critique of monogamous

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

With the birth of modern scientific inquiry, the Victorians required a radical readjustment to new concepts of space as well as time. Not only had the earth been shown to be immensely more ancient than had previously been believed, the discoveries of nineteenth-century astronomy revealed a universe of boundless space. Here are some other works that deal with societal change:

*Where the Air Is Clear* (1958), a novel by Carlos Fuentes.

This novel employs a tone of bitter and violent protest and describes many grave social problems in contemporary Mexico City.

*The Vortex* (1924), a novel by José Eustacio Rivera. This was the first novel written by a Colombian to offer realistic descriptions of Colombian cowherders of the plains and jungle rubber workers.

*Les Misérables* (1862), a novel by Victor Hugo. Hugo paints a vivid picture of Paris's seamier side while discussing the causes and results of revolution, the moral redemption of its main character, an ex-convict, and the moral redemption of a nation through revolution.

*The Faerie Queene* (1590), an epic poem by Edmund Spenser. This epic poem portrays the England of Spenser's dreams at a time when Queen Elizabeth I was on the throne and there was no heir to the crown.

*Dragon's Teeth* (1942), a novel by Upton Sinclair. This novel explores the rise of Nazism and won Sinclair the 1943 Pulitzer Prize for Literature.

morality—the belief that all sexual relations outside marriage must automatically be condemned, all inside sanctioned and approved. This belief, or the pressure it exerts, is responsible for virtually every disaster.”

### Responses to Literature

1. Thomas Hardy is known mainly as a novelist, but he considered his poetry better than his novels. After reading a selection of Hardy's prose and poetry, what is your opinion? Was he a better poet than novelist? Write a paper stating your position, using examples from the novels and poems to support your points.
2. Hardy shocked his readers by writing about such things as sexual relationships outside of marriage. Hip-hop artists today shock some people by writing about violence, drug use, and crime. One hundred years from now, do you think society will have changed so that those topics are no longer considered shocking?
3. How do you interpret the end of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*? Does Hardy have Tess end tragically because society demanded that fallen women be “punished”? Or is the ending an indictment of Victorian society? What would have to change in the novel for Tess to find happiness?
4. Readers interested in works that bear a kinship to Hardy's should try the works of D.H. Lawrence (1885–1930). Lawrence, like Hardy, is considered a realist who looked fearlessly at changing terms of the most intimate human relationships. His major novels include: *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *The Rainbow* (1915), and *Women in Love* (1920).

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### Jaroslav Hašek

BORN: 1883, Prague, Bohemia (now the Czech Republic)

DIED: 1923, Lipnice, Czechoslovakia

NATIONALITY: Czech

GENRE: Fiction, Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Good Soldier Švejk and His Fortunes in the World War* (1923)



Jaroslav Hašek Jaroslav Hasek, 1904, photograph. Courtesy of Richard Hasek. Reproduced by permission.

## Overview

Czech writer and humorist Jaroslav Hašek became internationally known for his novel *The Good Soldier Švejk and His Fortunes in the World War* (1923). He was also the author of approximately fifteen hundred stories, sketches, and newspaper columns; in addition, he wrote plays for cabarets. Hašek's work was closely linked to his unconventional lifestyle, which became the subject of many stories and legends that Hašek himself helped to create. In his best works, the spontaneity of his storytelling and overall ironic detachment indicate his belief in unpretentiousness and tolerance.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Tumultuous Early Life** Hašek was born on April 30, 1883, in Prague, in what is now the Czech Republic. Both his father, Josef Hašek, a mathematics teacher and bank official, and his mother, Kateřina (née Jaresová), came from south Bohemian families of farming stock.

They lived in Prague under precarious circumstances, moving often because of Josef Hašek's alcoholism and financial troubles. Hašek attended secondary school, but left in 1898 after experiencing academic difficulties and began working in a pharmacist's shop.

**First Publications** From 1899 to 1902, he studied at the Commercial Academy on Resslova Street, and, after his final examinations, he worked in the Slavia Bank. A year later, however, he gave up that job and set off on a journey through Slovakia, Hungary, the Balkans, and Galicia. In the next few years, he visited such places as Bavaria, Switzerland, and Austria and often traveled around Bohemia. He had already begun writing when he was still a student, and his first efforts had been published in newspapers and magazines. These were chiefly amusing accounts of his travels and short literary essays inspired by his roaming through Moravia, Slovakia, and Poland. Gradually, his studies of everyday life and original portraits of simple people became realistic rather than romantically charming, and his extravagant humor was already a signature element.

**Break with Modernists** At the beginning of the century, Czech cultural life was profiting from the modernist influences of the 1890s. Hašek counted himself one of the rising generation that stressed individual skepticism and revolt against convention. Reacting against aesthetic decadence and symbolism, they turned their attention directly to their own experiences in their daily lives. They tended to take up anarchic attitudes and to write in a loose, popular, mocking style. Hašek, however, was by nature cynical and anti-literary establishment, and he soon broke away from contemporary literary movements.

For him, writing was a mere job. He wrote mainly for amusement—his own and the public's. Even his first book, *Cries of May, and Other Verse* (1903), jointly written with Ladislav Hájek Domazlický, was a parody, shattering the sentimental delusions of poets and juxtaposing them with the unattractiveness of ordinary life and the contrasts between rich and poor. The activities and the naïveté of writers and artists—including himself—often became the targets of Hašek's mockery. Hašek later only rarely wrote satirical verse, such as *Kalamajka* (1913), which takes its title from the name of an old Czech dance.

**Military Life during World War I** World War I soon broke out, greatly affecting Hašek's life. The war began in 1914 when the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated in Serbia by a Bosnian terrorist. At the time, Prague and Bohemia were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as was much of what would later become Czechoslovakia. Because of entangling diplomatic alliances, what could have been a local conflict became a massive war engulfing much of Europe and territories worldwide. Austria-Hungary was allied with Germany and Turkey against Russia, Great Britain, France, and, later, the United States.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hašek's famous contemporaries include:

**James Joyce** (1882–1941): The Irish author whose novel *Ulysses* (1922) was initially banned because of its sexual content.

**Kahlil Gibran** (1883–1931): The Lebanese author whose *The Prophet* (1923), a collection of poetic essays, is still extremely popular.

**Zhou Zuoren** (1885–1967): An influential Chinese essayist and translator who rendered many myths and fictional writings into vernacular Chinese. He published a translation of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Gold-Bug" in 1905.

**Emiliano Zapata** (1879–1919): A Mexican rebel, Zapata created and led the Liberation Army of the South during the Mexican Revolution.

**Franklin Delano Roosevelt** (1882–1945): The thirty-second president of the United States, he served in office from 1933 until his death in 1945.

In February 1915, Hašek joined the Ninety-first Infantry Regiment of the Austro-Hungarian Army in České Budejovice. In September, he was taken prisoner by the Russians and sent to a prisoner-of-war camp in Dárnice, near Kiev, and then to Totskoye, near Buzuluk, where he survived a typhoid (a bacterial disease) epidemic. In the spring of 1916, Hašek enlisted in the Czech Foreign Legion, fighting against Austria on the side of the Russians.

**Wartime Writing Efforts** In the legion, Hašek worked as a typist and was secretary to the regimental committee. He also wrote humorous articles and reports for the magazine *Czecho-Slav*, in which he supported the fight for an independent state for Czech and Slovak territories then controlled by other countries. In 1917, he was involved in the battle of Zborov (the last Russian offensive of the war), and his valorous conduct was mentioned in dispatches. After the retreat to the Ukraine, however, he came into conflict with his superiors when he criticized the small-mindedness and the overcautious attitude of the Czech National Council in Russia and the leadership of the legion.

**Continued Radical Military Service** After the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, which saw the Russian monarchy removed in favor of what became the Communist-controlled Soviet Union, Hašek refused to go with the legion to France, and in the subsequent chaos at the end of 1917 and the beginning of 1918, he became involved in the attempt to establish a revolutionary council of Czech

workers and soldiers in Kiev. After that, he went to Moscow and joined the Czech Social Democrats (the Bolsheviks). He became a political activist in the Red Army, serving as a press organizer, editor of army magazines in various languages, and publicist. He organized recruitment in Samara. In 1919, he was in charge of the army printing works in Ufa.

During the five years of war and revolution the serious side of Hašek's nature revealed itself. Still impulsive and politically a radical, he gradually began to believe in the idea of social justice for which he might be able to work and live respectably. If the idea of social justice was to be put into practice, it would improve conditions even in Bohemia. Hašek, always keenly aware of the conflict between dream and reality, eventually seems to have lost this faith.

**Final Years** In August 1921, Hašek moved to the village of Lipnice nad Sázavou in southeastern Bohemia, which was then part of the newly formed Czechoslovak Republic. There, he worked on his novel, *The Good Soldier Svejk and His Fortunes in the World War*. He had already begun writing it in Prague, where it appeared in installments from 1921 to 1923. When his health deteriorated, he dictated the text of the novel, almost ready for publication, using his encyclopedic memory. However, he did not complete the task. He died on January 3, 1923, as a result of pneumonia and heart failure.

### Works in Literary Context

Critics often compare *The Good Soldier Svejk* to the works of Rabelais and Cervantes. Like the works of these predecessors, Hašek's novel is bawdy, disrespectful, and unrelentingly ironic. In fact, some critics have called *Svejk* the most thorough attack upon bourgeois values ever written. Even though *Svejk* has been analyzed on anarchist, nationalist, and socialist grounds, his individual and ambivalent nature defies absolute categorization. Given the critical nature of *The Good Soldier Svejk* and the sprawling nature of its plot, Hašek's most famous fictional work is best understood as a picaresque satire. That is to say, Hašek makes pointed attacks on his contemporaries (satire), and the novel follows the adventures of a wanderer.

**Satire** The originality of *The Good Soldier Svejk* is unquestionable, as is its status as a uniquely Czech work responding to particular historical circumstances. *Svejk* is hardly just historical fiction. It is clearly satirical, and it has been compared with the satires of British writer Jonathan Swift. Similarly, in his boisterous and often obscene humor Hašek has been compared with French satirist François Rabelais. Robert Pynsent, in *The First World War in Fiction: A Collection of Literary Essays*, compared Hašek's attack on the Austrian war effort with that of the Viennese satirist Karl Kraus, while J. P. Stern, in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, likened *Svejk* to American writer Joseph Heller's antiwar novel *Catch-22*.



**“Svejkism”** Commonly, satire focuses on situations rather than characters. Indeed, with *The Good Soldier Svejk*, Hašek was not concerned with delving deeply into the minds of his characters, who are all lovingly sketched types. The crucial factor is the situation created by the juxtaposition of these types and their collective involvement in the insanity of the world war. Thus Svejk’s idiotic, literal-minded obedience to orders from his superiors is a device used by Hašek to reveal the absurdity of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, its military bureaucracy, and ultimately the futility of war in general. This inimitable technique of subverting a military machine through excessive zeal, whether genuine or pretended, has inspired the term “Svejkism,” familiar to most central Europeans, even those who have not read the novel.

**Picaresque** *The Good Soldier Svejk* also belongs to another subgenre, possibly fiction’s oldest: the picaresque novel, which relates the adventures of a wanderer. *Svejk*’s episodic plot, its depiction of a central character from the underclass, and, above all, its perspective mark it as a classic twentieth-century example of this genre. The picaresque perspective is one that exposes pretense, and in *Svejk* codes of honor receive particular scorn, as do any notions that causes are worth dying for. This perspective is limited to the current state of society—Svejk himself is only interested in self-preservation, and the narration never points to any ideological or revolutionary solution to the problems depicted.

### Works in Critical Context

Most critical attention has been focused on *The Good Soldier Svejk*, primarily because only a few of his short stories have been translated into English and because of the popularity of *Svejk*. However, in both the stories and *Svejk*, critics have commented on the satire therein and regard the shorter fiction as a preparation, in style and theme, for the longer work.

***The Good Soldier Svejk and His Fortunes in the World War*** Despite the impressive nature of his satirical perspective, particularly in *The Good Soldier Svejk*, Hašek did not initially find favor with most Czech critics. Apart from the expected condemnations prompted by Hašek’s personal reputation, objections were raised concerning *The Good Soldier Svejk*’s vulgar expressions, allegedly obscene subject matter, invariably blasphemous treatment of religion, the crudeness of prose, and—above all—the unflattering light that the novel’s protagonist cast on the Czech national character. Those who took pride in the heroic exploits of the Czech Foreign Legion and justified World War I because it led to Czech independence did not wish to see Czechs presented as antimilitarist malingerers and saboteurs, least of all by a legion deserter.

Only the enthusiastic reception of *The Good Soldier Svejk* abroad—most notably in Germany, where Grete Reiner’s 1926 translation and subsequent theatrical versions created a genuine craze—compelled many Czech

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Whatever else might be said of *The Good Soldier Svejk*, the novel is above all else an adventure novel—a novel about the travels and travails of its protagonist. Here are a few other novels and films that take place on the road:

*The Crossing* (1994), a novel by Cormac McCarthy. In this novel, young Billy Parham captures a wolf on his farm in New Mexico. He decides to return the wolf to Mexico, where he thinks it has come from, and in crossing over into Mexico, his life changes forever.

*The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955), three novels by J. R. R. Tolkien. This trilogy of fantasy novels describes protagonist Frodo’s perilous trip across Middle-earth to Mordor and back to his home, the Shire.

*Without a Paddle* (2004), a film directed by Stephen Brill. In this film, three childhood friends reunite in their early thirties to travel to Oregon in search of the lost, stolen treasure of D. B. Cooper.

*On the Road* (1957), a novel by Jack Kerouac. This defining work of the postwar Beat generation is a largely autobiographical work written as a stream-of-consciousness creation. The story is based on the spontaneous road trips taken by the author and his friends across mid-century America.

critics to reexamine Hašek’s novel. This reevaluation, completed under the Communist regime, eventually led to Hašek’s reputation as a literary master.

While *The Good Soldier Svejk* has been hailed as a masterwork, its protagonist has been the subject of a critical debate: Is he *really* the idiot he seems, or is his idiocy a mask deliberately assumed to thwart the Austrian military bureaucracy? Ample evidence exists for either point of view. The assertion that Svejk’s idiocy is a deliberately assumed mask points to a crucial issue concerning the character, the author, and the very nature of writing under an oppressive regime. Though Hašek wrote the final version of *The Good Soldier Svejk* in the relatively free atmosphere of the Czechoslovak Republic, his literary style and even his personality, as Gustav Janouch has suggested in *Jaroslav Hašek*, was formed by living under a repressive system—one that imposed censorship—and by the resulting need to mask one’s true sentiments.

### Responses to Literature

1. Based on your reading of *The Good Soldier Svejk*, do you think that Svejk is the idiot he seems to be? In what ways, if at all, will the answer to this question affect your reading and enjoyment of the text? Write a paper in which you outline your opinions.

2. Read Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Crossing* after reading *The Good Soldier Svejk*. How do McCarthy and Hašek use travel differently or similarly? In other words, why do you think each chose to use travel to initiate their respective plots? Cite passages from each text to support your response in an essay.
3. Think of a trip you took in your life. What happened during this trip? In what ways did the trip affect your life—who you are, what you feel, what you believe? What interesting or bizarre people did you encounter on this trip? Write the story of this trip.
4. Hašek is largely remembered as a satirist—a person who creatively criticizes those people, practices, or sets of beliefs that he or she finds ridiculous or unjustifiable. Write a satire while keeping these questions in mind: What practice or set of beliefs do you find ridiculous or unjustifiable? How can you show that this practice or set of beliefs is ridiculous or unjustifiable? What characters would you need to create in order to demonstrate the superiority of your alternative set of beliefs or practices?

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## Gerhart Hauptmann

BORN: 1862, Obersalzbrunn, Silesia, Germany

DIED: 1946, Agnetendorf, Silesia, Poland

NATIONALITY: German, Polish

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

*Before Dawn* (1889)

*The Weavers* (1891)

*The Rats* (1911)



Gerhart Hauptmann Hauptmann, Gerhart, photograph. AP Images.

### Overview

When dramatist Gerhart Hauptmann became the thirteenth recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1912, only two of his predecessors (Rudyard Kipling in 1907 and Maurice Maeterlinck in 1911) had received this recognition at an earlier age. In his heyday during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Hauptmann was one of the most prolific and most imitated German dramatists.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Early Years of Quiet Influence** Gerhart Hauptmann was born Gerhard Johann Robert Hauptmann on November 15, 1862. Hauptmann's elementary schooling, which began in his birthplace, Ober-Salzbrunn (now Szczawno-Zdrój, Poland), and continued in Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland), ended abruptly in 1878 as a consequence of his father's loss of the resort hotel he owned. He was sent to learn a trade in Breslau and then on to study farming with his uncle, but he soon abandoned farming and went to art school with the aim of becoming a sculptor. He traveled to Italy in 1883 and 1884.

These early years of Hauptmann's life coincide with a momentous time in the history of what is now Germany. When Hauptmann was born, modern Germany did not exist. What is now Germany was a loose confederation of

independent kingdoms. The most powerful of these was Prussia. In 1864, the newly appointed prime minister of Prussia, Otto von Bismarck, waged war on Denmark, resulting in the Austro-Prussian War of 1866. The war established Prussian dominance in German affairs and allowed Prussia to annex many German states. By 1871, Germany was unified, becoming a modern nation-state, and building a powerful empire that would last until the end of World War I in 1918.

**Learning the Trade** On May 5, 1885, Hauptmann married Marie Thienemann and moved with her to Berlin. In September they moved to Erkner, a suburb of Berlin, where Hauptmann met many of the people who would appear as characters in his plays. It was during this time his focus shifted from sculpting to drama. He encountered young writers such as Max Kretzer (later called the “Berlin Zola”); Wilhelm Bolsche, whose *The Scientific Foundations of Literature* would be one of the most important manifestos of German naturalism; and Bruno Wille, a strong advocate of the Social Democratic Party. Since 1884 Hauptmann had been taking acting lessons from Alexander Hessler, who would provide the model for the politically and artistically conservative theater director Hassenreuter in *The Rats*. This instruction, which lasted until 1886, offered Hauptmann insights into conventional modes of acting, the practical demands of the theater, and, as *The Rats* reveals, a clearly defined target against which his own first plays could be directed.

**1889: A Great Year for Naturalists** The year 1889 was a turning point in the development of naturalism and also in Hauptmann’s career. In Germany and abroad, the Industrial Revolution was in full swing; one of its cultural ramifications was an increasing tendency to apply scientific concepts to the study of human behavior. In literature, this produced a style called naturalism. New naturalist drama would find a home at the “Freie Bühne” (Free Stage), a club devoted to the performance of “modern” (naturalist) drama. Its first chairman was Otto Brahm, who developed the naturalist style of stage direction and production that would dominate the German theater. In August of 1889 Hauptmann’s first mature, modern play, the social drama *Before Dawn*, had been published in Berlin and had caught the attention of many literary figures there. Needing a German playwright to make his undertaking a success, Brahm premiered Hauptmann’s play on October 20, 1889. The work launched not only a series of imitations but also a frenzied conflict between conservative literary forces and the naturalists.

**Continued Success** Hauptmann followed up his success with *Before Dawn* with three more plays produced in rapid succession: *Das Freidensfest* (1890), *Einsame Menschen* (1891), and *Die Weber* (*The Weavers*, 1892). *The Weavers* focused on an uprising of Silesian weavers in 1842. Two later tragedies, *Fuhrmann Henschel* (1898) and *Rose Bernd* (1903), also focused on Silesian folk life.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hauptmann’s famous contemporaries include:

**Joseph Conrad** (1857–1924): Polish novelist who wrote many of his works in English, including *Heart of Darkness*.

**Mark Twain** (1835–1910): American novelist, essayist, and humorist whose *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is often cited as the greatest American novel ever written.

**Sigmund Freud** (1859–1939): Pioneering Austrian psychiatrist who founded the school of thought known as psychoanalysis.

**Susanna M. Salter** (1860–1961): At the age of twenty-seven, in 1887, Salter became the first female mayor after being elected in the town of Argonia, Kansas—a notable achievement at least in part because women in Kansas were only granted the right to vote a week prior to the election.

**Archduke Franz Ferdinand** (1863–1914): The assassination of this Austro-Hungarian empire’s heir-presumptive began a series of events that triggered World War I.

**Sun Yat-sen** (1866–1925): Chinese revolutionary and political leader who is often referred to as the “Father of Modern China.”

Hauptmann divorced his first wife in 1904 and married an actress who had been his mistress. He subsequently began an affair with a young Austrian actress Ida Orlov, who would serve as inspiration for several of Hauptmann’s later characters.

Hauptmann reached the pinnacle of his career in 1911 with the production of *The Rats*. One year later he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

**A Long Twilight** World War I, a devastating conflict that involved all of Europe and killed tens of millions of people, engulfed Germany in 1914. Hauptmann declared himself a pacifist and continued to write, but he never regained the stature of his pre-war years even after the war ended. Hauptmann died in 1946, shortly after the end of World War II.

### Works in Literary Context

Hauptmann’s naturalistic plays of the late nineteenth century established him as a major artist in modern drama. Though he produced a vast assortment of works in various genres throughout his long career, it is these early dramas on which his literary standing was founded and endures.

**Naturalism** Hauptmann is recognized primarily for initiating the naturalist movement in German theater

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Hauptmann's play *The Weavers*, though set in the 1840s, dramatized a social injustice that persisted even when the play was staged. Other works that call attention to social injustice include:

*The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), a novel by John Steinbeck. Depicting the troubles facing Oklahoma farmers—as exemplified by the Joad family—during the time of the Great Depression, this novel has become a lasting portrait of a family in crisis with nowhere to turn for lasting, sustained help.

*The Jungle* (1906), a novel by Upton Sinclair. This text reveals the gritty underside of the meatpacking industry and was so effective in portraying these horrors that then-president Theodore Roosevelt enacted new regulations for the industry because he was so moved by the book.

*Hotel Rwanda* (2004), a film directed by Terry George. In this film, the horrors of the Rwandan genocide are depicted in all their brutality. Given the problems in Darfur, the film not only draws attention to the bitter tribulations that Rwandans underwent in the mid-1990s but also calls for intervention in the genocide being committed in the Sudan.

*Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002), a film directed by Philip Noyce. This film—based on a true story—dramatizes the plight of Australian aboriginal peoples during the 1930s, when many children were removed from the custody of their parents in order to be educated by the state or made to work for white families.

with his first drama, *Before Dawn*. Influenced by the work of Henrik Ibsen and Émile Zola, Hauptmann became his country's most prominent exponent of dramatic techniques that sought to portray human existence with extreme faithfulness, particularly focusing on the social problems of the lower classes. Naturalism is an attempt to capture in art realistic situations, characters, and behaviors without exaggeration or self-consciousness. Many contemporary naturalists in Germany during the late nineteenth century had been calling for “truth” rather than beauty, and Hauptmann's play responded to this demand.

### Works in Critical Context

Though highly praised during his lifetime as an innovative force in German literature, Hauptmann is no longer widely read. Ultimately his reputation seems to have suffered because of his versatility. Some critics contend that his concern for experimentation and innovation in drama, poetry, and prose kept him from attaining mastery

in any single genre. Nonetheless, Hauptmann's naturalistic plays have generally received fair reviews from critics but have often been censored for their supposedly controversial content. His masterwork, *The Rats*, is an excellent example.

***The Rats*** *The Rats* is the most complex and subtle play in Hauptmann's canon. Its main plot is strongly naturalistic: Frau John, a cleaning woman who lives in a rat-infested former barracks, adopts the illegitimate child of a Polish maid but convinces her husband, a bricklayer, that she has given birth to it. She is discovered despite her brother's murder of the true mother and commits suicide. After Hauptmann gained a court decision against a petty objection by the censor regarding the play, the premiere took place on January 13, 1911, in Berlin. The reaction was subdued. Even Alfred Kerr, one of the most perceptive theater critics, an exponent of naturalism, and an enthusiastic supporter of Hauptmann, had little to say about *The Rats* that was good. But five years later, when the play was performed again, another critic, Siegfried Jacobsohn, wrote in the periodical *Die Schaubühne*: “Criticism is self-criticism. Why did I flop in 1911 when confronted by *The Rats*?” In retrospect, it can be seen that the cause of the rejection in 1911 is the very “modernity” and relevance of *The Rats*—its complex intertwining of the tragic and comic and its ironic, disquieting view of human existence and social values.

Although no longer popular, Hauptmann enjoys an enduring reputation of significance. Of Hauptmann's status today literary critic Roy C. Cowen writes, “Hauptmann remains for most theater-goers and literary historians alike the outstanding representative of strongly realistic, character-oriented, socially critical plays.”

### Responses to Literature

1. Hauptmann has been described as a humanitarian, and his *Before Dawn* is often cited as proof. Read this play. In what ways does Hauptmann express his humanitarian concerns in the play? Cite specific examples in your response.
2. Read *The Weavers* and Sinclair's *The Jungle*. Each of these texts deals with the problems facing workers in two specific industries. In a short essay, describe your reaction to these portrayals. Consider these questions while drafting your essay: What are the problems these workers face? Which work is more effective in making you understand and care about the subjects? Why?
3. Hauptmann's work is remarkable for his ability to portray real people in his dramas, particularly the way they speak. Think of someone you know who has a unique way of speaking, and write an imaginary conversation between yourself and that person. Try to keep in mind the words and phrases the person would use, as well as the sentence structure the

person uses when speaking (which may not be the same as “correct” written sentence structure). If the person has a distinctive way of pronouncing or emphasizing certain words, try to reflect this as well.

4. Using the Internet and the library, research the “realist” tradition in American literature, a literary movement exemplified by the works of Mark Twain. Then, in a short essay, compare this movement to the naturalism movement that Hauptmann led. What were the origins, concerns, and results of each movement? Do you agree with the principles Hauptmann stood for? Why or why not?

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## Václav Havel

BORN: 1936, Prague, Czechoslovakia (now Czech Republic)

NATIONALITY: Czech

GENRE: Drama, poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Memorandum* (1965)

*Audience* (1975)

“The Power of the Powerless” (1978)

*Temptation* (1985)

*Living in Truth* (1987)



Václav Havel Havel, Vaclav, photograph. AP Images.

### Overview

A world-renowned playwright and human rights activist, Václav Havel became the president of Czechoslovakia in December of 1989, the country's first leader following the fall of the authoritarian regime he had helped to overcome. His literary brilliance, moral authority, and political victories served to make him one of the most respected figures of the late twentieth century and led to his country being one of the first Eastern European nations to be invited into NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***A Privileged Childhood in Prague*** Václav Havel was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, to a wealthy and cultivated family. His father was a restaurant owner, real estate developer, and friend of many writers and artists, and his uncle owned Czechoslovakia's major motion picture studio. The coming of World War II, however, with Nazi troops marching into Prague in March of 1939, shifted—though it did not destroy entirely—the family's lifestyle. While much of Europe was in flames, Havel grew up amid the trappings of luxury, with servants, fancy cars, and elegant homes—but he also grew up in a country occupied by Nazi troops, where mass killings occurred.

After the conclusion of World War II, world-level tension increasingly took the form of animosity between Russia- and China-centered Communist regimes and the United States and Western Europe. A coup d'état in 1948 ensured that Czechoslovakia would belong to the



list of states sympathetic to—and often wholly dependent upon—the Soviet Union. The 1948 Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia radically changed the Havel's lives. Their money and properties were confiscated, and Havel's parents had to take menial jobs. Havel and his brother were not allowed to attend high school, but after discovering a loophole in the system, Havel attended school at night for five years while working full-time during the day. His friends, like himself, wrote poetry and essays and endlessly discussed philosophical matters.

From 1957 to 1959 Havel served in the Czech army, where he helped found a regimental theater company. His experience in the army stimulated his interest in theater, and following his discharge he took a stagehand position at the avant-garde Theater on the Balustrade. The eager would-be playwright attracted the admiration of the theater's director, and he progressed swiftly from manuscript reader to literary manager to, by 1968, resident playwright. It was while at the Theater on the Balustrade that Havel met, and in 1964, married Olga Splichalova. Of working-class origin, his wife was, as Havel later said, "exactly what I needed. . . . All my life I've consulted her in everything I do. . . . She's usually first to read whatever I write." This marriage of working-class and bourgeois values symbolized perfectly the period of 1968 reforms known as the Prague Spring, when reformers in the Czechoslovak government (chief among them Alexander Dubcek) loosened restrictions on the media, on personal speech, and on travel—in effect, allowing the arts to flourish and democracy to begin to function in Czechoslovakia.

### *The Prague Spring Gives Way to Soviet Winter*

A Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August of 1968 brought an abrupt end to the cultural flowering of the "Prague Spring" and marked a watershed in Havel's life. He felt he could not remain silent about conditions under the Communist regime, especially as reconstituted in occupied Czechoslovakia, so he began his long career as a human rights activist. He ran an underground radio broadcast asking Western intellectuals to condemn the invasion and to protest the human rights abuses of the new and repressive administration of Gustav Husak. The government responded by banning the publication and performance of Havel's works and by revoking his passport. Although he was forced to take a job in a brewery, he continued to write, and his works were distributed clandestinely. He courageously refused to leave Czechoslovakia during this time. In 1975, Havel wrote an "Open Letter to Doctor Gustav Husak," decrying the state of the country as a place where people lived in fear and apathy. The "Letter" attracted much notice and put Havel at risk.

In January of 1977, hundreds of Czech intellectuals and artists, Marxists and anti-Communists alike, signed Charter 77, which protested Czechoslovakia's failure to comply with the Helsinki Agreement on human rights.

Havel took an active part in the Charter 77 movement and was elected one of its chief spokespeople. He was subsequently arrested and jailed and tried on charges of subversion. Given a fourteen-month suspended sentence, Havel was unrepentant, stating: "The truth has to be spoken loudly and collectively, regardless of the results." Arrested again in 1978 for similar activities, Havel was finally sentenced to four and a half years at hard labor. He served the sentence at a variety of prisons under arduous conditions, some of which are chronicled in his book *Letters to Olga* (1988). A severe illness resulted in his early release in March of 1983.

***A Symbol of Freedom, and Its Champion*** From this point forward, Havel was viewed both at home and abroad as a symbol of the Czech government's repression and the Czech people's irrepressible desire for freedom. He continued his dissident activities by writing a number of significant and powerful essays, many of which are collected in *Václav Havel: Living in Truth* (1987). Highly critical of the totalitarian mind and regime while exalting the human conscience and humanistic values, the essays contain some splendid and moving passages. The government responded by tapping his telephone, refusing to let him accept literary prizes abroad, watching his movements, and shooting his dog.

In January of 1989 Havel was arrested again, following a week of protests, and was sentenced this time to serve nine months in jail. On November 19, 1989, amid growing dissatisfaction with the regime in Czechoslovakia and similar discontent throughout Eastern Europe, Havel announced the creation of the Civic Forum. Like Charter 77, a coalition of groups with various political affiliations and a common goal of nonviolent and non-partisan solution, the forum was quickly molded by Havel and his colleagues into a responsive and effective organization. The week following the creation of the forum marked the beginning of the so-called "Velvet Revolution," in which Czechoslovakia's Communist regime collapsed like a house of cards. With almost dizzying speed, a new, democratic republic was smoothly and bloodlessly established. On December 19, Parliament unanimously elected Havel to replace the former Communist leader. To the cheering throngs that greeted him after his election, Havel said, "I promise you I will not betray your confidence. I will lead this country to free elections." On July 5, 1990, Parliament reelected an unopposed Havel as president for a two-year term, and in 1993 Parliament elected him first president of the Czech Republic, following the political division of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

***Joining Hands with the West*** The positive changes in the former Soviet bloc country under Havel's leadership led to a landmark event. On July 8, 1997, NATO invited the Czech Republic, along with Poland and Hungary, to be the first Eastern European nations to become a part of the Western alliance. French president Jacques

Chirac honored Havel, comparing the playwright-turned-president to Winston Churchill, Charles de Gaulle, Mohandas Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela.

## Works in Literary Context

### *Dehumanization and Communist Modernity*

Havel's plays are powerful condemnations of the bureaucratization and mechanization of modern Czech society and their effects on the individual. His satires depict the prevalence of cliché and official doublespeak under a totalitarian government and the resulting disintegration of meaning. His works are political theater, but they are also recognized as being much more than that. Many of Havel's works are considered absurdist black comedies because they incorporate grotesque and ludicrous elements, giving expression to humanity's fundamental discomfort in a godless universe. Many of his plays also clearly take place in Communist Czechoslovakia, and his characters' behavior is motivated by circumstances of that time and that place.

But Havel also wrote plays such as *The Memorandum* and *Temptation*, which are more like parables than explorations of real life. Sometimes they border on anti-utopian fantasy. Instead of a realistic setting, such dramas revolve around fictitious institutions like the Orwellian office in *The Memorandum*, complete with watchmen hidden in the hollow walls to keep an eye on employees through special cracks, or the scientific institute at war with society's "irrational tendencies" in *Temptation*. What goes beyond realism in these plays, actually, is not so much the setting as the plot's starting device: the introduction of Ptydepe, the artificial language for interoffice communication in *The Memorandum*, and the bureaucratic forms of idolatry of "rational science" that produce the rebellion of the protagonist in *Temptation*. Such works owe much to the literary legacy of greats like George Orwell and Samuel Beckett. In particular, though, his emphasis on nightmarish visions of bureaucratic incompetence and dominance draws from the well of fellow Prague writer and absurdist extraordinaire, Franz Kafka.

***Vanek the Recurring Protagonist*** One deep link between Havel's realistic and parable-like plays is their shared protagonist. In almost all of Havel's plays, a single protagonist by the name of Ferdinand Vanek pops up at the center of the plot. The now legendary figure of Vanek appears first in *Audience* and then reappears in Havel's next two one-act plays, *Unveiling* and *Protest*. At the same time, the underground success of *Audience* gave rise to a one-of-a-kind literary phenomenon: a constellation of plays employing the same protagonist but written by different authors. "The Vanek plays" therefore include works written by Pavel Kohout, Pavel Landovsky, and Jiri Dienstbier, as well as of course Havel, all reprinted in *The Vanek Plays: Four Authors, One Character*.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Havel's famous contemporaries include:

**Tom Stoppard** (1937–): British playwright, born in Czechoslovakia. Among Stoppard's many recent plays is *Rock 'n' Roll* (2006), about the years leading up to and including Czechoslovakia's 1989 "Velvet Revolution," and dedicated to his friend Václav Havel.

**Samuel Beckett** (1906–1989): Irish playwright, a founding figure in both literary modernism and postmodernism, whose bleak dramas reveal the absurdity of life and the unavoidability of simple human determination.

**Nelson Mandela** (1918–): South African revolutionary and president (1994–1999). Mandela spent twenty-seven years in prison for his resistance to the racist apartheid government in South Africa, becoming an effective leader and an even more effective moral symbol when he became the country's first black president.

**Boris Yeltsin** (1931–2007): President of Russia from 1991 to 1999. Yeltsin, always a colorful and contrary political figure, was instrumental in Russia's transition away from state Communism during the 1990s.

**Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn** (1918–2008): Russian writer and political activist. After spending time in prison for criticizing Stalin, Solzhenitsyn wrote an account of his experiences in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1963), which resulted in his expulsion from the Soviet Union.

***The Plight of the Dissident*** What the Vanek characters share is a position in society. All of them can be roughly defined as dissidents in a totalitarian state or cogs in the wheels of a powerful institution. This position entails a number of consequences, the most crucial of which is the character's being part of a political and moral minority. Such characters stand opposed to a way of life that privileges blind obedience to authority, thoughtless concentration on the necessities of everyday life, and a deep-seated distrust of any protester or reformer. Vanek, therefore, is by no means a valiant knight in shining armor or a modern Robin Hood who serves the poor. Despite all the words of cautious support and solidarity that some of his acquaintances occasionally dare whisper into his ear, Vanek is hated and despised. He is hated because he "disturbs the peace" of pacified minds, and he is despised because he cannot help being a loser. The forces that he opposes are too powerful. Particularly in the wake of the Soviet crushing of the Prague Spring of 1968, authoritarian regimes behind the Iron Curtain seemed quite nearly all-powerful: One had a moral obligation to resist, but that resistance was futile.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Creative writers are often intensely aware of the power of language, and not only for its capacity to describe and open up new thoughts. Language can also hide the truth and limit the freedom of thought. Here are some works that focus not only on the power, but also on the dangers of language:

*1984* (1949), a novel by George Orwell. In Orwell's not-so-imaginary world of a totalitarian dictatorship, the government invents a language called "Newspeak" designed to shut down common sense and independent thinking.

*Fahrenheit 451* (1953), a novel by Ray Bradbury. Bradbury uses science fiction to satirize the ways repressive governments limit human thought by banning works of literature. The hero of the novel is a "fireman," or book burner, who starts hiding books to share with a group of underground readers.

"On the Reconstruction of Literary and Art Organizations" (1932), a decree by Joseph Stalin. This was the decree that made "Soviet Realism" the official artistic policy of the Soviet Union. Writers and artists of all kinds were to reject all forms of "decadent bourgeois art," especially anything that was abstract or impressionistic, in favor of plain-spoken texts that glorified the working class and Soviet society.

***The Uses and Abuses of Words for Life*** Heavily influenced by theater of the absurd playwrights, Havel's early plays were clever, sometimes grim exposés of the relationship between language and thought. It is obvious that much of this sharp critique of language is directed against a totalitarian system. Havel reveals the vastly different ways in which language may be used. On the one hand, language can express the highest flights of man's intellect—his ability to reason and analyze the complexities of his physical and spiritual existence, defining a perception of truth. On the other hand, language can propagandize, conceal, and blur the reasoning process—jumbling analysis, burying the truth, and masking lies with the makeup of smooth rhetoric. The weight of an ideologically controlled bureaucracy smothers honest communication.

***Language and Power*** Havel's work, which has influenced a generation of Czech authors after him, revolves around some common themes: the unwillingness to give up one thing for another, the refusal to adhere to a hierarchy of values, and criticism of the ways authority figures construct arguments to rationalize their lies. Many of these themes are interconnected and interrelated with one of the author's other major themes, the temptation to achieve goals through the manipulation of language. Havel shows

how this process occurs through omission, deliberate confusion, and exaggeration. The theme of language temptation extends to other types of temptation in Havel's works, including the temptation to power. Havel relies on implied shades of meaning to simultaneously mock and "tempt" his readers, taking them through a spectrum of philosophical questions about truth and falsehood, reason and rationalization, and good and evil. Beyond his fictional work, Havel has also written a number of very influential political and philosophical essays, the most important among these being perhaps his seminal "The Power of the Powerless" (1978).

### Works in Critical Context

From the start, Havel's politico-philosophical essays and plays were translated into many languages. The plays, in particular, were performed and appreciated by the public in a number of countries. His earliest plays, including *The Garden Party* (1963), *The Memorandum* (1965), and *The Increased Difficulty of Concentration* (1968), were instant successes in Czechoslovakia and abroad, where they received much popular as well as critical acclaim.

***Relegation to Dissident Status*** When approaching a play by Havel, critics often had certain preconceptions. They knew, for example, that Havel was one of the most famous dissidents under the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia, that none of his plays were performed in official theaters there, and that he was harassed and imprisoned several times. Consequently, many critics have argued that as a literary figure, Havel's life and writings were so closely interwoven with the political situation in his country that they, as critics, must have been provided with a ready-made guide to the interpretation of his works. Journalists, reviewers, and academic commentators followed this obvious approach and discussed Havel's writings largely as the direct outcome of what he was observing in his society. The "dissident playwright" label stuck hard and fast to Havel's image.

***Temptation*** Often, however, how critics responded to Havel's dissident works depended on where they were from, telling perhaps as much about the assumptions and the degree of receptivity of the critics' culture as about the plays themselves. For example, responding to a flashy but shallow production of *Temptation*, New York critics regarded the play largely as the manifesto of someone who opposes an oppressive political regime. They appreciated the author's wry insights on the broader nature of dogma. The Viennese papers, on the other hand, were mostly concerned with Havel's allegedly unsatisfactory treatment of other literary figures, such as the German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Goethe, they complained, was put into the service of antitotalitarian criticism. The reaction of the British papers and other media was remarkably different. Brought up on William Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde, Samuel Beckett, and Tom Stoppard, the British critics were aware that "the play's the thing" and regarded the drama as an "intoxically"

theatrical piece. Although they recognized that the workings of evil that was depicted sprang from a totalitarian system, they believed Havel succeeded in going beyond this and did not confine the play to that system. In Britain, critics concluded that *Temptation* was one of the great artistic adventures of its day.

## Responses to Literature

1. What is "Theater of the Absurd"? Is it a fair description of Havel's plays? What are some of the absurdist themes and situations in Havel's works, particularly *The Memorandum*?
2. What are the pros and cons of reading Havel's plays through the lens of his political life? What has Havel himself said about this in interviews?
3. The poet Percy Bysshe Shelley once said that poets are the "unacknowledged legislators of the world." What did Shelley mean by this? What do you think of poets and playwrights becoming political leaders, or political leaders becoming poets and playwrights? What are other examples of politicians who have become creative writers, or vice versa?
4. Read "The Power of the Powerless" and consider the arguments about freedom and responsibility Havel makes there. In your assessment, to what extent are these arguments plausible. Support your thesis with detailed analysis of the logic and rhetoric of Havel's text.

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## Bessie Head

BORN: 1937, Pietermaritzburg, Natal, South Africa

DIED: 1986, Botswana

NATIONALITY: Botswanan

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968)

*Maru* (1971)

*A Question of Power* (1973)



Bessie Head Head, Bessie, photograph. Reproduced by the kind permission of the Estate of Bessie Head.

## Overview

Bessie Head explored the effects of racial and social oppression and used the theme of exile in her novels and short stories. She was of mixed race, and she experienced discrimination both in her birthplace of South Africa and in her adopted land of Botswana. Her novels, unlike many other works of protest literature, cast a distinctly female perspective on social injustice and the psychological costs of alienation. Head, however, refused to be called a feminist, insisting instead that she abhorred all oppression—racial, sexual, and political.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**An African Childhood** Bessie Amelia Emery was born on July 6, 1937, in a mental hospital in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. Her white mother, Bessie Amilia Emery, had been committed there because the father of her child was a black stable hand, whose name is now unknown. Their relationship was forbidden under South Africa's Immorality Act of 1927, which barred sexual relations between people of different races. This was one of many such rules found under the government-sponsored system of rule later known as apartheid, which is Afrikaans for "separateness." Apartheid also designated certain buildings, areas, and services for use only by certain races and led to the segregation of living areas within South Africa, with black citizens of different cultural groups separated from each other as well as separated from whites.

Bessie was handed over to "Coloured," or mixed-race, foster parents, who cared for her until she was thirteen. Because her natural mother had provided money for Bessie's education, she was placed in a mission orphanage, where she earned a high school diploma and was trained to be a teacher. She taught elementary school and then wrote for the African magazine *Drum*.

**Marriage and Divorce** In September 1961, she married Harold Head, a journalist with whom she later had a son, Howard. Around this time she also entered the world of literature, publishing a poem and several autobiographical pieces in the *New African*, a left-wing journal that followed most of its contributors into exile later in the decade.

The Head family lived in a slum in Cape Town because apartheid laws dictated that people of different races had to live in specific districts. While living there, Head worked on a novel, *The Cardinals* (published posthumously in 1993). Her marriage broke up after a few years, and she accepted a teaching job in the British Bechuanaland Protectorate (later Botswana), because, in her words, she could no longer tolerate apartheid in South Africa. Head left South Africa with her infant son in March 1964. Because of her political affiliations and friendships with left-wing activists, however, she was

denied a passport and instead was given a canceled exit visa, depriving her of South African citizenship.

**Life in Exile** When the teaching job did not materialize, Head was declared a political refugee in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and was required to report to the police daily. She had no income other than a small allowance provided by the World Council of Churches and without a passport she was unable to seek employment opportunities elsewhere. Head did much of her writing in a small home without electricity and sold homemade guava jam for extra money during the early years of her life in Botswana. For fifteen years, she lived as a refugee at Bamangwato Development Farm.

**The Novels** On the strength of *The Cardinals*, which was still unpublished, Head was offered a contract with New York publishing house Simon and Schuster to write a novel about Botswana, which became independent from Britain in 1966. The result was *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968). Head's first published novel is the story of Makhaya Maseko, a political refugee from South Africa who escapes to Botswana after serving a prison term for sabotage. *When Rain Clouds Gather* was widely acclaimed as a surprisingly mature first novel.

Head was less concerned with political or economic ideology than with moral principles, such as generosity, courtesy, and respect for the common person. For her, both white neocolonial oppression and the black nationalist backlash were impediments to African progress. With what she called in *When Rain Clouds Gather* the "hate-making political ideologies" of newly independent Africa came a new set of reactionary ideas, and she regarded people who promoted those ideologies as "pompous, bombastic fools."

During 1969–1970 Head suffered sporadic attacks of mental illness. Nevertheless, in 1971 she published her second novel, *Maru*. The theme of this novel is racism, not of whites against blacks as might be expected, but the prejudice of the Tswana people, the Botswana majority, against the Masarwas, the Bushmen or indigenous people of the Kalahari Desert. As in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Head cannot unite the sphere of public life and social commitment with that of the inner life and individual fulfillment.

*A Question of Power* (1973) is Head's most perplexing novel and the one that has received the most attention from critics. Openly autobiographical, the novel charts the terrifying course of her mental breakdown, her recovery, and her ultimate affirmation of the values—humility, decency, generosity, and compassion—that provide the basis for Head's moral perspective in all three novels.

Head did come to love her adopted country and was fascinated by its history. In the early 1970s, Head became interested in the history of the Bamangwato people, one of Botswana's main tribes. Her oral history of the tribe, *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*, was commissioned but



then rejected by Penguin. The book was virtually complete by 1976 but did not appear in print for another five years. Meanwhile, a collection of stories that Head was inspired to write by her interviews with the Serowe villagers was published in 1977 as *The Collector of Treasures, and Other Botswana Village Tales*. This collection was considered for the *New Statesman's* Jock Campbell Award. The stories vividly and richly evoke the sense of a living, bustling village struggling to cope with the intrusion of new forces into the traditional social fabric and explores the social condition of women.

**Global Recognition and Later Life** Head gained further renown as a writer in the 1970s. She was invited to speak at a 1976 workshop at the University of Botswana alongside other notable South African writers and was invited to international writers' conferences, to which she traveled after being granted a special United Nations refugee travel document. Finally, in 1979, she was granted Botswanian citizenship and visited Europe for the first time when she took part in Berlin's Horizons '79 Africa Festival. In 1984, she traveled to Australia. Though she was hailed as one of the most important female African writers in English, Head had endured a difficult life and began to drink in her later years. Her health declined, and she contracted hepatitis. After sinking into a coma, she died in April of 1986 at the age of forty-eight.

Two volumes of Head's writings have been published posthumously: *Tales of Tenderness and Power* (1989) and *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings* (1990). Each collection begins with a substantial biographical introduction and ends with Head's observations about the role of storytellers in South Africa.

## Works in Literary Context

**African Feminism** Head has been acclaimed by such internationally renowned authors as Angela Carter and Alice Walker and has served as an inspiration to female writers of Africa, and, more particularly, to the suppressed women of her native South Africa. Noting in *Black Scholar* that Head has "probably received more acclaim than any other black African woman novelist writing in English," Nancy Topping Bazin adds that Head's works "reveal a great deal about the lives of African women and about the development of feminist perspectives." According to Bazin, Head's analysis of Africa's "patriarchal system and attitudes" enabled her to make connections between the discrimination she experienced personally from racism and sexism and the root of oppression generally in the insecurity that compels one person to feel superior to another.

**Old Ways Versus New Ways** The theme of conflict between old and new, a recurring one in African fiction since Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), is given a fresh direction by Head, notably in *When Rain Clouds*

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Head's famous contemporaries include:

**Lewis Nkosi** (1936–): South African writer and essayist whose work explores politics, relationships, and sexuality; he has lived outside of South Africa since 1961.

**Lilian Ngoyi** (1911–1980): South African antiapartheid activist and orator; the first woman elected to the executive committee of the African National Congress, the antiapartheid political party, and cofounder of the Federation of South African Women.

**Winnie Madikizela-Mandela** (1936–): Controversial South African activist and politician, as well as ex-wife of former South African president Nelson Mandela. She has headed the African National Congress's (ANC) Women's League and currently sits on the ANC's National Executive Committee.

**Sipho Sepamla** (1932–2007): One of the leading South African "Soweto poets" that rose out of the Black Consciousness movement in the 1960s and 1970s; awarded the French Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 1985.

**Mao Zedong** (1893–1976): Head of the Communist Party and the People's Republic of China from its founding in 1949 until his death. He oversaw the Chinese Cultural Revolution in the 1960s.

**Sheila Rowbotham** (1943–): British feminist and writer who argues that socialist feminism is necessary because women are oppressed by economic as well as by cultural forces.

*Gather*. The novel diverges from other works that deal with this theme in at least two important ways: It inverts the customary story line, which focuses on the passage of the protagonist from a rural village to the bright lights of the city, and it avoids a simplistic pattern of racial conflict by allowing for the possibility of interracial cooperation and friendship.

**The African Individual in Fiction** Many works by African writers in the twentieth century dealt specifically with political issues facing developing nations. Head departed from this tradition. In Head's concern with women and madness in *A Question of Power* (1973), critic Charles Larson claims, she "almost single-handedly brought about the inward turning of the African novel." The novel was ranked eighth of fifteen "most influential books of the decade" by the journal *Black Scholar* in its March–April 1981 issue.

Larson credits the importance of *A Question of Power* not just to the introspection of its author, but to her exploration of subjects previously "foreign to

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Head's first works focus on themes of refugeeism and racism, but in her later works she shifted the focus from an individual's struggle for dignity to helping preserve the cultural and historical heritage needed to achieve dignity. Here are some works that examine similar themes.

*Emperor Shaka the Great* (1979), a poem by Mazisi Kunene. An epic poem originally written in Zulu, this work tells the story of the rise of the Zulu people under the great leader Shaka.

*Daughters of the Twilight* (1986), a novel by Farida Karodia. A fourteen-year-old girl of Asian and "Coloured" (mixed black and white) parents tells of her life under apartheid in this novel.

*Have You Seen Zandile?* (1990), a play by Gcina Mhlope. In this award-winning play, a girl raised in Durban, South Africa, by her grandmother is kidnapped by her mother to live in the rural Transkei region and become a "traditional and proper" woman.

*Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (1997), a novel by Phaswane Mpe. This novel addresses the mixture of tradition, the black middle class, inner-city violence, and AIDS in post-apartheid Johannesburg, South Africa.

African fiction as a sub-division of the novel in the Third World: madness, sexuality, guilt." Noting that the protagonist's "Coloured classification, her orphan status at the mission, and her short-lived marriage" represent the origin of most of her guilt, Larson attributed these factors directly to "the South African policy of apartheid which treats people as something other than human beings."

Robert L. Berner considered the novel "a remarkable attempt to escape from the limitations of mere 'protest' literature in which Black South African writers so often find themselves." Berner recognized that Head could have "written an attack on the indignities of apartheid which have driven her into exile in Botswana," but instead chose to write a novel about the "response to injustice—first in madness and finally in a heroic struggle out of that madness into wholeness and wisdom."

Bessie Head's achievements result from her uncompromising attitude to her work and to life in general. When many black South African writers of the period went into exile in Britain, Europe, and the United States, Head chose Botswana, which was then almost completely undeveloped. And while her contemporaries were producing searing indictments of apartheid South Africa, Head turned to local sources for inspiration and recorded in stories of parable-like intensity the daily lives of people in a remote African village.

## Works in Critical Context

Critics have analyzed Head's novels in terms of their thematic concerns and their thematic progression. Suggesting that the works "deal in different ways with exile and oppression," Jean Marquard noted that "the protagonists are outsiders, new arrivals who try to forge a life for themselves in a poor, underpopulated third world country, where traditional and modern attitudes to soil and society are in conflict." Unlike other African writers who are also concerned with such familiar themes, observed Marquard, Head "does not idealize the African past and 'resists facile polarities, emphasizing personal rather than political motives for tensions between victim and oppressor.'" "It is precisely this journeying into the various characters' most secret interior recesses of mind and 'of soul,'" Arthur Ravenscroft observed, "that gives *When Rain Clouds Gather*, *Maru*, and *A Question of Power* a quite remarkable cohesion and makes them a sort of trilogy."

**Maru** Critical reaction to *Maru* has been diverse, ranging from Lewis Nkosi's view that it is "as nearly perfect a piece of writing as one is ever likely to find in contemporary African literature" to Cecil Abrahams's dismissal of it as "a rather weak vapoury study on theme of racial prejudice." *Maru* is Head's attempt to universalize racial hatred, pointing out that victims seek other victims lower in power and prestige than themselves.

**A Question of Power** The symbolic richness in *A Question of Power* invites a wide range of critical interpretation. The extensive sexual content and dominant concern about insanity have prompted readings, including that of Adetokunbo Pearse, drawing heavily on psychology and arguing that the sexual negativism expressed in the book is the result of the negative self-image projected on black Africans by the South African government.

Readers who seek in Head's work metaphorical statements about the future of Africa find a picture of enduring hope touched by a cynical mistrust of politics. Feminists, including Femi Ojo-Ade, have been attracted by the female protagonist of *A Question of Power* and the nature of the battle she wages.

Religious interpretations (such as those of Linda Susan Beard and Joanna Chase) are also common, fed by the Christian symbolism of the main character, Elizabeth, as a Christlike figure who redeems herself and the world through her suffering. These readings are not incompatible with Head's overriding humanistic message that God and goodness are to be found in people. Similarly, Arthur Ravenscroft discerned no "confusion of identity" between the character and her creator: "Head makes one realize often how close is the similarity between the most fevered creations of a deranged mind and the insanities of deranged societies."

## Responses to Literature

1. Should immigrants to the United States keep their cultural traditions, or should they try to fit in with

American culture? What if they are political refugees? Are the personal costs greater for those who try to melt into the big American “pot,” or those who try to maintain their traditions?

2. Using the Internet and your library’s resources, research the social fabric of a country that you are unfamiliar with in terms of the feel of its general society. As well as looking at official Web sites and sources, read several blogs by people, both male and female, from that country. Write a paper examining the country as presented by traditional sources versus the blogs. What hidden details are revealed by ordinary people’s lives?
3. Prejudice is not just about race (black/white); people of different ethnic groups (Serbs/Bosnians), religions (Muslim/Christian), or even divisions of the same religion (Roman Catholic/Protestant) can be prejudiced against each other. Research two or three authors who write about different forms of prejudice. Write a paper examining their conclusions about the causes of prejudice and how these prejudices manifest themselves in people’s every day lives and families. Where do you see discrete or overt prejudices in your social circles? How do your peers respond to these prejudices?

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## Seamus Heaney

BORN: 1939, County Derry, Northern Ireland

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

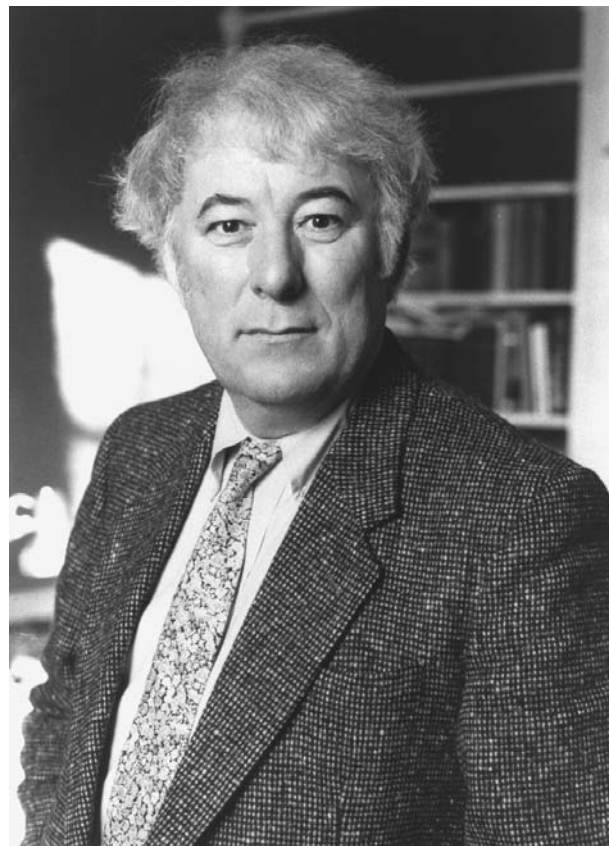
*Death of a Naturalist*: (1966)

*North* (1976)

*The Haw Lantern* (1987)

*Beowulf: A New Translation* (1999)

*District and Circle* (2006)



Seamus Heaney Heaney, Seamus, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

## Overview

From the beginning, critical as well as popular acclaim has greeted each volume of Seamus Heaney's poetry. In 1966 his first full-length book appeared. Few would have predicted the impact such poetry would have. It is, after all, a poetry about rural subjects and traditional in structure—a poetry that appears to be a deliberate step back into a premodernist world and that rejects most contemporary poetic fashions.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Childhood in Northern Ireland** Heaney was born April 13, 1939, in a rural area near Ulster, Northern Ireland. His childhood shaped much of his poetry, including the first volume, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), for which he won immediate success. In most of these poems, Heaney describes a young man's response to beautiful and threatening aspects of nature. In "Digging," the poem that opens this volume, he evokes the rural landscape where he was raised and comments on the care and skill with which his father and ancestors farmed the land. Heaney announces that as a poet he will metaphorically "dig" with his pen. In fact, many of the poems in his volume *Door into the Dark* (1969) search for hidden meaning.

Seamus Heaney was born the oldest of Margaret and Patrick Heaney's nine children and lived in Mossbawn, the place of the family farm in County Derry, Northern Ireland, about thirty miles northwest of Belfast. This landscape offered a definite sense of belonging and tradition and lifestyle that became part of the local rhythm.

**Old and New Conflicts** The landscape also offered reminders of ancient conflicts and losses, some reaching back in history to the threshold of myth. Old tensions also extended in the other direction, right into the present. Although his family was part of the Catholic majority in the local area living in relative harmony with the Protestants, at an early age Heaney was conscious of living in what he has called the "split culture of Ulster." Between the villages of Castledown and Toome, he was "symbolically placed between the marks of English influence and the lure of the native experience, between 'the demesne' [representing English and Unionist power] and the [native] 'bog'.... The demesne was walled, wooded, beyond our ken."

In the decade before Heaney was born, the people of Ireland were embroiled in a devastating civil war over the country's fate as either a dominion of Great Britain or as an independent nation, and the conflict remained far from resolved. According to a treaty signed in 1921, Northern Ireland was established as an administrative region of Great Britain separate from Ireland, and maintained its own government. Some of its citizens—primarily Catholics known as Nationalists—believed that Northern

Ireland should be reunited with the Republic of Ireland to form an independent nation free of British control. Other citizens of Northern Ireland—primarily Protestants known as Unionists—believed that Northern Ireland should remain a part of Great Britain. This led to a decades-long series of violent clashes between the two groups known as The Troubles. Heaney grew up in the region at the heart of these conflicts, which grew more violent as the years passed.

Heaney attended St. Columb's College in Londonderry and then Queen's University in Belfast; all the while, He carried with him the impressions of his childhood world that would become such an important part of the substance of *Death of a Naturalist*. He studied at Queen's until 1961 when he received a first-class honors degree in English language and literature. The following year, he took a postgraduate course of study leading to a teacher's certificate at St. Joseph's College of Education in Belfast. These development years provided an essential prelude to the writing of his poems.

**Teaching** While he was teaching at St. Thomas's Secondary School in Ballymurphy, Belfast, from 1962–1963, Heaney collected some of the first poems that were published in *Death of a Naturalist*. From 1963 through 1966 he was a lecturer in English at St. Joseph's College. It was during these years when he was associated with the Hobsbaum group that he became firmly established in the literary world. Three of his poems published in the *New Statesman* in December 1964 came to the attention of Faber and Faber, who eventually became his chief publisher. Heaney also obtained at position at Queen's University where he had once attended. In 1965 his *Eleven Poems*, a pamphlet, was published by Festival Publications, Belfast, and in August of the same year he was married to Marie Devlin. *Death of a Naturalist*, which appeared in May 1966, brought Heaney the E. C. Gregory Award. In July of that year, his son Michael was born.

After the publication of *Door into the Dark* in 1969, Heaney's poetic views quickly came under the heavy pressure of political events and violence in Northern Ireland. Heaney left the political turmoil in Northern Ireland to teach at University of California, Berkeley, in 1970, only to find that Berkeley was experiencing its own turmoil over the Vietnam War at that time.

**Writing in Wicklow** The source of his writing remained in Ireland. While in Berkeley, he began writing a series of twenty-one prose paragraphs that drew on his childhood. These would be published in pamphlet form in Belfast with the title *Stations* (1975). Soon after the family's return from California, Heaney resigned his position at Queen's University and moved his growing family south to Glanmore, County Wicklow, in the Irish Republic. During these years, as he attempted to earn his living as a writer, he gave several poetry readings in the United States and England, wrote essays, and edited two poetry

anthologies: *Soundings: An Annual Anthology of New Irish Poetry* (1972) and *Soundings II* (1974).

In 1975, Heaney assumed a teaching position at Caryfort College, a teacher-training institution in Dublin, where he became head of the Department of English. In the following year, after four years in Glanmore, he and his family moved to Dublin, acquiring a house along the bay about halfway between the center of the city and Dun Laoghaire. Heaney kept up his transatlantic ties, frequently giving readings of his poems in America. The connection with America became stronger after 1981, when he resigned his position at Caryfort College and, in February 1982, began a five-year arrangement to teach each spring semester at Harvard, where he had already taught in the spring semester of 1979. The arrangement was now permanent, with Heaney acquiring the title Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory. Another tie with America was Robert Lowell, with whom the Heaneys became close during the last few years of Lowell's life.

**A Major Poet** Following the well-received *Field Work*, Heaney published *Selected Poems 1965–1975* and *Preoccupations: Selected Prose*, both in 1980. *Preoccupations* offers candid and engaging accounts of his poetic origins and development; the critical essays on other poets are also revealing of his own interests. Another of his preoccupations has been the medieval Irish work *Buile Suibhne*, a story of a mad northern king transformed into a kind of bird-man. Heaney followed this with a translation of *Beowulf* in 1999 and further collections of both prose and poetry in the new century.

## Works in Literary Context

**Depictions of Northern Ireland** In 1995, Heaney became the fourth Irish writer and second Irish poet to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. The first was William Butler Yeats whose influence can clearly be seen in Heaney's work. Part of Heaney's popularity, however, stems from his unique subject matter—modern Northern Ireland, its farms and cities beset with civil strife, its natural culture and language overrun by English rule. The landscape he was born into offered a definite sense of place and tradition. Critics have seen this in both the *North* and *Wintering Out* collections.

**American Modernism** In 1970, Heaney and his family moved to America. Heaney became guest lecturer at the University of California Berkeley, where he was exposed to the poetry of Gary Snyder, Robert Duncan, Robert Bly, and, perhaps most importantly, William Carlos Williams. This exposure helped loosen his own verse in *Wintering Out* so that it ceased being “as tightly strung across its metrical shape.”

**Ancient Traditions and Myths** Heaney's preoccupation with ancient traditions and myths—and not just those of Ireland—are evident in many of his works. His

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Heaney's famous contemporaries include:

- Frank McCourt** (1931–): Irish-American author of the award-winning 1996 memoir *Angela's Ashes* (1996).
- Peter O'Toole** (1932–): Academy Award-winning Irish actor famed for such films as *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) and *The Stunt Man* (1980).
- Ted Kooser** (1939–): The Poet Laureate of the United States from 2004–2006 and winner of a 2005 Pulitzer Prize for poetry.
- Gerry Adams** (1948–): President of Sinn Féin, an Irish Republican political organization.
- Shane McGowan** (1957–): Lead singer and songwriter for the Irish band The Pogues.

*Bog Poems* recall both the myths of ancient Celtic peoples and the history of those who invaded the region such as the Norse. One of Heaney's most successful projects was a modern translation of the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*, considered one of the greatest mythical tales of Europe. Heaney has also translated a series of laments from sixteenth-century Poland, and has written two plays that are updates of ancient Greek works by the classic dramatist Sophocles.

## Works in Critical Context

A native of Northern Ireland who divides his time between a home in Dublin and a teaching position at Harvard University, Heaney has attracted a readership on two continents and has won prestigious literary awards in England, Ireland, and the United States.

Heaney's ambiguous status as an “émigré” may well have contributed to the rather cool, even sour, reception of *North* by critics in Belfast. The reception elsewhere, however, was mostly positive, as in Anthony Thwaite's praise in the *Times Literary Supplement* of the “pure and scrupulous tact” of the poems, which are “solid, beautifully wrought.” Popular response is measurable by the six thousand copies sold in the first month. The book also won the W. H. Smith Award and the Duff Cooper Prize, which was presented, in accordance with Heaney's wishes, by Robert Lowell. It was also the Poetry Book Society Choice.

**Field Work** Generally, reviewers of Heaney's fifth major poetry collection, *Field Work*, treated Heaney as an important literary figure, placing him in the same poetic pantheon as William Butler Yeats, Wallace Stevens, Walt Whitman, and other major poets. Denis Donoghue suggests in the *New York Times Book Review* that in *Field Work* “Heaney is writing more powerfully than ever, more fully in possession of his feeling, more at home in his style.”



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Heaney's work is often inspired by the landscape of his homeland and the rich history attached to it. Other works deeply rooted in the historical significance of landscape include:

"Nature" (1836), a collection of essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson's famous essay details the many practical, aesthetic, and spiritual benefits of the American landscape.

*Wuthering Heights* (1847), a novel by Emily Brontë. The story of a dark romance in which the bleak moors of northern England feature almost as a character in their own right.

*West-Running Brook* (1928), a book of poems by Robert Frost. This collection of poetry was created at the height of Frost's illustrious career. Many poems are inspired by the New Hampshire countryside.

*Out of Africa* (1937), a memoir by Isak Dinesen. This memoir by Danish writer Dinesen covers her life on a farm in Kenya in the first part of the twentieth century.

### Responses to Literature

1. What is the connection between Heaney's poetry and Northern Ireland? Is he nostalgic or bitter about the places of his childhood?
2. As a Catholic farmer in a Protestant country, Heaney grew up in many ways an outsider before moving to County Wicklow in 1972. How does this theme of polar opposites and outsiders appear in Heaney's work?
3. Many critics note that Heaney's work is at least superficially easy to understand, but also that many of his poems are also about the making of poetry. Choose one passage that illustrates his approach to writing poetry and write a paper discussing Heaney's craftsmanship.
4. Heaney won the Whitbread Prize for his translation of *Beowulf* in the year 2000 over other contenders like the Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling. Write a paper evaluating the judge's decision. Be sure to research and reference the actual criteria used by the judges.
5. All twentieth-century Irish literature has been colored on some level by Ireland's relationship with England. Research the political situation in Ireland and discuss how Heaney addresses the situation in his poetry. Be sure to include specific references to the poetry.

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## Lafcadio Hearn

BORN: 1850, Leukas, Greece

DIED: 1904, Okubo, Japan

NATIONALITY: American

GENRE: Travel, criticism, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*  
(1894)

*Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*  
(1903)

*Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation*  
(1904)



Lafcadio Hearn Hearn, Lafcadio, photograph. The Library of Congress.

## Overview

In a relatively short life of fifty-four years, Lafcadio Hearn managed to have several different literary lives. Today, it is Hearn's work on Japan—where he was known as Koizumi Yakumo after becoming a citizen—that has maintained his literary reputation, although the locales of his travel writing are extensive and international. Also considered one of modern America's leading prose impressionists, Hearn produced a large body of work that is more closely related to nineteenth-century European than American literature. His sketches, short stories, and novellas demonstrate a vision of evil and the supernatural reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire. Hearn is also recognized as a perceptive literary critic whose readings and theories reflect his devotion to the beautiful and the bizarre. His lectures on American and European literature, published in collections such as *Interpretations of Literature*, are exceptional for their break with the conventions of Victorian criticism, and his essays on Japanese culture long influenced Western perceptions of East Asia.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***A Life in Transit*** Hearn was born on the Ionian island of Levkas, off the coast of Greece. His parents, a

British army surgeon and his Greek wife, separated six years later and placed Hearn with an aunt in Ireland. He attended St. Cuthbert's College and there suffered a mishap on the playing field that resulted in the loss of sight in his left eye. This injury, coupled with Hearn's severe myopia, caused the abnormal enlargement of his right eye, giving him an odd appearance that commentators often use to explain his lifelong sense of estrangement and, consequently, his affinity for subjects outside the mainstream of human experience. Hearn immigrated to the United States in 1869 and eventually settled in Ohio. There he met an English printer, Henry Watkins, who trained him as a proofreader and encouraged his literary ambitions.

Hearn began his career as a feature writer for the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, gaining notoriety for his stories on slum and riverfront life. He received national attention with his report of the sensational "Tan Yard Murder." Hearn's account, written after viewing the coroner's autopsy, contains vivid descriptions of the gruesome crime and the victim's charred corpse. In the late 1870s, Hearn moved to New Orleans, where he wrote for local newspapers and contributed to national magazines. His writings included editorials, book reviews, short stories, local color sketches, adaptations of Creole and foreign folktales, and translations of Spanish and French works. During this period, Hearn pledged himself "to the worship of the odd, the queer, the strange, the exotic, the monstrous."

In 1887 he traveled to the West Indies. Two years later, under commission to *Harper's Magazine* for a series of articles, Hearn left for Japan. He remained there for the rest of his life, lecturing in English and comparative literature at schools and universities and recording his impressions of the East for Western readers. This resulted in many of his most enduring works, including *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things* (1904), a collection of folk tales and ghost stories largely derived from older Japanese texts that was published just prior to his death from heart failure.

## Works in Literary Context

### ***The Bizarre, the Supernatural, and the Sensuous***

Hearn's work is divided into three periods, each corresponding to a juncture in his life. The first consists of the sketches, short stories, and journalism that appeared in New Orleans newspapers and various national magazines. These works, collected in *Exotics and Retrospectives, Fantasies and Other Fancies*, and *Leaves from the Diary of an Impressionist*, focus on the bizarre, the supernatural, and the sensuous. Set in New Orleans, they offer colorful, romantic descriptions of Creole society conveyed in an ornate and consciously affected style. *Stray Leaves from Strange Literature* and *Some Chinese Ghosts*, also of this

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hearn's famous contemporaries include:

**Yone Noguchi** (1875–1947): This bilingual Japanese author, who published works both in English and Japanese, wrote influential fiction, poetry, essays, and literary criticism.

**Queen Victoria** (1819–1901): Ruling monarch of the United Kingdom and the British Empire whose reign spanned sixty-three years. Victoria remains an important symbol of her time and of the expansion of the British Empire.

**Friedrich Nietzsche** (1844–1904): Nietzsche was an influential German philosopher who wrote critically about a variety of subjects, including morality, religion, culture, and science. His work's influence can be seen in both the existentialist and postmodern movements.

**Oscar Wilde** (1854–1900): A popular figure in Victorian England, this Irish author and playwright enjoyed considerable success until details of his personal life emerged in a criminal libel trial, resulting in his imprisonment.

**Sigmund Freud** (1856–1939): Neurologist, medical scientist, biologist, and writer, this Austrian is widely regarded as the father of psychoanalysis.

period, are volumes of obscure fables freely adapted from Eastern legends.

**The Caribbean** Hearn's second period, encompassing material based on his life in the Caribbean, comprises the book of sketches *Two Years in the French West Indies* and the novellas *Chita* and *Youma*. Extravagant diction and lush imagery pervade these efforts, as do the motifs of death and ruin. Moreover, these works, which depict the interrelationship of nature and humankind and the struggle for survival between civilized and primitive peoples, manifest Hearn's interest in the evolutionary philosophy of Herbert Spencer.

**Late Life in the Far East** The Far East, particularly Japan, is the dominant subject of Hearn's third period. Although the author's predilection for the grotesque is still evident, his style became more subtle and controlled. Hearn's first impressions are recorded in *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, a series of vignettes that extol the land and its people. *Out of the East* and *Kokoro* contain similar sketches, while *In Ghostly Japan* relates traditional ghost stories and fairy tales. Hearn's final book on the East, the posthumously published *Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation*, stands in contrast to his earlier volumes,

which were largely uncritical of East Asian culture. In this collection of essays, Hearn, warning against the trend toward westernization, expressed his disillusionment with contemporary Japan and his concern for its economic and cultural independence.

### Works in Critical Context

Lafcadio Hearn's reputation as a writer and, in particular, as a travel writer, benefited from the initial fascination of the West for the "Mysterious East." Although the present postcolonial and postmodern context would sometimes make of him the practitioner of a bygone exoticism, the often earnest quality of his work and the sheer quantity of his output—whether set in America, the Caribbean, or Japan—make him a figure to be reckoned with. Today, Hearn is best remembered as a literary pioneer of the East.

Critics find that at his best, Hearn was an exacting author whose work displays craftsmanship and integrity. At his worst, he appeared a flowery, mannered stylist rather than a creative artist. He has been praised for his ability to arouse the senses but criticized for the lack of variety in his sketches and short stories. Critics contend that, with the exception of *Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation*, he sentimentalized and misrepresented various aspects of Eastern culture. Yet, these works are credited with familiarizing Western readers with the people and traditions of the East. Despite the unevenness of his work, most reviewers agree that Hearn is an important prose stylist; a perceptive, albeit unconventional, critic; and an intriguing literary personality.

***Chita, a Memory of Last Island* (1889)** *Chita*, Hearn's novella about the Last Island hurricane that struck southern Louisiana in 1856, was inspired by events well-known to his contemporary readers. An unsigned review in the *Nation* called it "the slightest possible melody set to an elaborate accompaniment," noting that the author seems more concerned with describing the sea itself than with the characters or the island that was destroyed by the hurricane. The reviewer concludes, "On the whole, the impression left by the book is that of an ill-treated opportunity, a rarely fine subject made tiresome by a lush style." Ferris Greenslet, writing in 1911, finds more to love in the work, noting that it "is still in many respects his most astonishing *tour de force* in word-painting." Greenslet acknowledges, however, that "the only logic in the harrowing conclusion is the emotional logic of a temperament immitigably macabresque, that must make a tale of terror intensify in poignancy to the end."

### Responses to Literature

1. Select one of Hearn's travel essays from Japan. What biases does Hearn bring to his writings on the Far East?

Discuss your emotional reaction to the essay. Discuss any biases that influenced your reading of the essay.

2. Why does Hearn include a study of insects in the collection *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*? How does this section relate to the other stories?
3. Compare and contrast the three literary lives led by Hearn. How did the locations of New Orleans, the West Indies, and Japan affect his writing style?
4. Discuss the influence of Hearn's personal background on his works. Where is it most apparent? Citing specific examples from his texts, discuss the role that biographical details have on the emotional impact of his work.

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## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

As a sufferer of early disfigurement, much of Hearn's work is characterized by a responsiveness to the world's outcasts. Other works that explore themes relating to social alienation include:

*The Metamorphosis* (1915), a novella by Franz Kafka. In this novella, Gregor Samsa, a traveling salesman, wakes up to find that his body has been transformed into a "monstrous vermin."

*The Sun Also Rises* (1926), a novel by Ernest Hemingway. Jake Barnes, the novel's narrator, remains alienated in his pursuit of Lady "Brett" Ashley as a result of an injury incurred during World War I that rendered him sexually impotent.

"Good Country People" (1926), a short story by Flannery O'Connor. The self-named Helga, a university-educated nihilist, is hoodwinked by a traveling Bible salesman who steals her wooden leg.

## George Herbert

BORN: 1593, Montgomery, Wales

DIED: 1633, Bremerton, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Memoriae matris sacrum* (1627)

*A Priest to the Temple; or, The Country Parson His Character, and Rule of Holy Life* (1632)

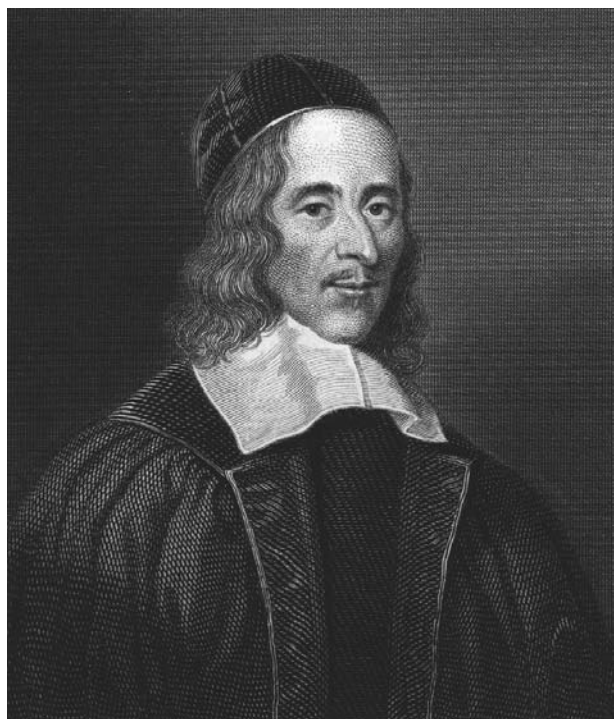
*The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (1633)

### Overview

George Herbert was a seventeenth-century English poet best known for writing intensely devotional verse using simple, direct speech. Although considered a metaphysical poet, alongside John Donne and Andrew Marvell, Herbert avoided secular love lyrics in favor of sincere, holy worship. His best-known work, *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (1633), is admired as a profound exploration of humanity's relationship with God.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Educated in England** The fifth of ten children, George Herbert was born on April 3, 1593, into a family of political prominence in Montgomery, Wales. After the death of his father in 1596, Herbert's mother moved the



George Herbert © Michael Nicholson / CORBIS

family to Oxford so that she could supervise the education of her oldest son, Edward, who later became known for his philosophical writings. At the time, England was ruled by Queen Elizabeth I, who was overseeing both the beginnings of the British colonial empire as well as a golden age of drama, literature, and music.

While at Oxford, Herbert's mother befriended John Donne, a writer whose metaphysical poetry would considerably influence Herbert's career as a poet. In 1604, Herbert began attending the Westminster School in London. An excellent student in Greek and Latin, Herbert received one of three Westminster nominations to Trinity College at Cambridge University in 1609. By this time, England was ruled by Elizabeth's successor, James I of England, who had taken the throne in 1603 and established the Stuart line.

**Decided on Career as a Poet** In 1610, Herbert wrote a letter to his mother in which he declared he would be a poet dedicated to celebrating God's glory. Included in this letter were two poems, "My God, Where Is That Ancient Heat toward Thee" and "Sure, Lord, There Is Enough in Thee to Dry." Throughout his years at Cambridge, Herbert wrote verse in both Latin and English, much of it remaining unpublished during his lifetime. In 1616, after earning bachelor's and master's degrees, Herbert was elected a fellow of Trinity College, a post that required him to take holy orders within seven years.

At Cambridge, Herbert held several positions, including lecturer in rhetoric and deputy orator. Elected

university orator in 1620, he assumed responsibility for speaking on occasions of state and composing official correspondence. Four years later, Herbert requested through the archbishop of Canterbury that the probationary period for his ordainment as a deacon be waived. At this time, Herbert was also involved in politics. He was a courtier at the court of James I from 1620 to 1625 and a member of parliament for Montgomery, Wales, from 1624 to 1625. In 1625, James I was succeeded by his son Charles I, who soon faced opposition, as he often attempted to act without the consent of Parliament. While the date of Herbert's ordination is uncertain, it is known that he became a canon of Lincoln Cathedral in 1626.

**Published First Poetry** A year later, Herbert published his first work, *Memoriae matris sacrum* (1627), a collection of poetry written in Latin on the death of his mother. It included a funeral oration by John Donne. Herbert was appointed rector of Bremerton and ordained a priest in the Church of England in 1630. During the following two years, he revised many of his earlier poems and wrote *A Priest to the Temple; or, The Country Parson His Character, and Rule of Holy Life* (1632), a prose discourse on Anglican pastoral practice. Herbert then began working on his most famous work, *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (1633).

Falling ill with tuberculosis—a contagious bacterial disease of the lungs that had no cure and was easily spread—Herbert completed the manuscript of *The Temple* and sent it to a friend, Nicholas Ferrar, to ensure its publication. Herbert died of the disease on March 1, 1633, before the volume was put in print.

## Works in Literary Context

Herbert meticulously experimented with form and meter, rarely repeating rhyme schemes and often creating patterns with an intent to break or alter them. Herbert's structural artistry may have been influenced by the *Greek Anthology*, a collection of poems used by Renaissance poets as a reference for poetic practice. Additionally, the Bible provided a model of stylistic diversity for Herbert, especially the book of Psalms, which has long been described as an encyclopedia of poetic genres and voices. Verse translations of the psalms, particularly those by Sir Philip Sidney, may have inspired Herbert's formal experimentation—perhaps Herbert believed that a variety of religious experiences could be captured only in a variety of poetic forms.

**Metaphysical Poetry** Herbert belonged to the group of seventeenth-century writers known as the metaphysical poets. In deliberate contrast to the English poetic tradition of using common metaphors, the work of the metaphysical poets is characterized either by new and unusual metaphors or by traditional metaphors used in new ways. Metaphysical poetry combines ordinary speech with puns, paradoxes, and conceits, metaphors that shock the reader



by comparing two highly dissimilar things. Often, these poems are presented in the form of an argument, have complicated subjects, and attempt to show a psychological realism when describing the tensions of love, whether the love is physical or spiritual.

Evident in Herbert's poetry is his debt to John Donne, pioneer of the metaphysical movement. However, Herbert made the form his own with a simplicity of diction and metaphor. Presenting ideas with logical persuasion, Herbert finds metaphors in everyday experience, using commonplace imagery as opposed to the sophisticated language of other metaphysical writers. This results in work that appears less intellectual than that of Donne, who expresses his uncertainty in rational terms and then resolves it in the same way. In contrast, Herbert will end a poem with two lines that resolve the argument without addressing each specific point raised in the poem. Because Herbert's arguments encompass recognizable human emotions, his work is easy to comprehend, while understanding Donne often requires concentrated effort.

In comparison with other metaphysical poets, Herbert puts less emphasis on conceits and striking imagery, relying instead on the Bible for stylistic inspiration. Herbert favors ordinary images, as illustrated by the thorn, wine, and fruit he uses to great effect in "The Collar." By exploring his own faith through the techniques of metaphysical poetry, Herbert expanded the genre to allow the poet a more personal approach.

**Legacy** Although Herbert was a writer of humility and integrity—not one in search of celebrity—he has nonetheless been a popular, influential writer through the years. Many seventeenth-century poets—metaphysical poets Richard Crashaw and Henry Vaughan, for example—openly acknowledged their debt to Herbert's techniques and subjects. The impressive reach of Herbert's influence includes such later writers as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Emily Dickinson, Gerard Manley Hopkins, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, and Elizabeth Bishop.

### Works in Critical Context

Herbert was a well-respected figure in his lifetime, praised by Francis Bacon and John Donne, for example. During the 1600s, *The Temple* was valued for the simple piety of its religious sentiments, and many of its poems were adapted as hymns. Between 1633 and 1679, thirteen editions of the collection were published. Although Methodist leader John Wesley did adapt some of Herbert's poems for his church, interest in the works of Herbert and other metaphysical poets declined during the eighteenth century, and no new editions of *The Temple* were issued from 1709 to 1799. The Romantic age, however, saw a revival of appreciation for Herbert's poetic skills and moral values. His reputation was enhanced by such writers of the eighteenth century as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Herbert's famous contemporaries include:

**Galileo Galilei** (1564–1642): Galileo built the first high-powered astronomical telescope and confirmed the Copernican theory of the solar system.

**Peter Paul Rubens** (1577–1640): Considered by many to be Europe's most influential artist of the seventeenth century, Rubens created vibrant paintings that united the classical with the romantic. His pieces include *The Raising of the Cross* (1610).

**Gian Lorenzo Bernini** (1598–1680): In addition to inventing the baroque style of sculpture, Bernini was also a brilliant architect. His sculptures include *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1647–1652).

**Francis Bacon** (1561–1626): A leading figure in the fields of natural philosophy (now known as physical science) and scientific methodology, Bacon also explored questions of ethics, law, and religion. His books include *New Atlantis* (1627).

**Robert Herrick** (1591–1633): Herrick's *His Noble Numbers* (1633) contains more than twelve hundred short religious poems in an assortment of forms, including epigrams, epistles, and verses of love.

**Louis XIII** (1601–1643): King of France from 1610 to 1643, Louis XIII was a strict Catholic as well as a soldier intent on protecting his subjects.

While scholars at the beginning of the twentieth century considered Herbert a relatively minor writer of popular didactic verse, an increasing number of studies have approached his poetry from various perspectives: biographical, rhetorical, liturgical, and literary. Contemporary critics generally praise Herbert's work as a noble attempt to express the indescribable complexities of spiritual life. What was regarded as simple in the past has been reevaluated as subtle. Because his writing demonstrates technical flexibility, analytical intelligence, an exceptional talent for capturing spiritual crises in verse, a distinctive style, and a voice mindful of literary traditions and conventions, many scholars consider Herbert to be one of the most important literary figures in the English language.

**The Temple** Because Herbert's final manuscript of *The Temple* has never been discovered, the arrangement of the poems in *The Temple* has been the subject of extensive controversy among scholars, who have surmised several possible organizational patterns for the collection's arrangement of poems, including events of the Christian liturgical calendar and the progression of the soul from birth to death.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Two of Herbert's most anthologized poems are "The Altar" and "Easter Wings," shape poems—also called figure poems—in which the poem is written or printed in a shape that reflects the subject of the poem. The earliest shape poem known was written about 300 B.C.E. by the Greek poet Simias of Rhodes. His poem, in the shape of an axe, was probably written to be inscribed on a copy of the ancient axe that was used to build the wooden Trojan Horse. Other well-known shape poems include:

*Calligrams* (1918), poems by Guillaume Apollinaire. With the publication of this work, which is composed of complex shape poems, Apollinaire coined the word *calligram* to describe literature in which words are assembled to form an object.

*Come to My Party, and Other Shape Poems* (2004), a children's poetry collection by Heidi Roemer. Springtime rain, ocean waves on a summer day, Halloween pumpkins, snow-covered hills—the poems in this book celebrate the shapes one can find in each season.

*Types of Shapes* (1991), a poetry collection by John Hollander. Some playful, others artistic, these poems show that form can enhance meaning in poetry.

The general consensus is that *The Temple* can be divided into three major sections: "The Church Porch," "The Church," and "The Church Militant." Composed of seventy-seven six-line stanzas that read like epigrams, "The Church Porch" provides moral instruction on conducting oneself in day-to-day activities, avoiding sin, and worshipping with a proper attitude. To a great extent, critical attention has focused on the "Church" section of *The Temple*, which contains most of the individual pieces that make up the volume. The poems in this section display a range of metrical patterns and rhyme schemes. "The Church Militant," the closing section, provides an allegorical history of Christianity from antiquity to Herbert's time.

### Responses to Literature

1. Choose a concrete object and write a shape poem at least fifteen lines long about the object. On a separate page, write one short paragraph explaining why you chose the particular object you did. In another paragraph, answer the following: Stylistically and thematically, how is a writer limited by choosing to use shape poetry as a poetic form? Does writing a poem in the shape of its subject enhance the meaning of the poem? Why or why not?
2. In "The Altar," the speaker describes his heart as a stone altar. What else do you think the stone motif might refer to? What collaboration between the human and the divine is necessary to make a Christian poem? Write a paper in which you outline your ideas.
3. Read "The Altar" and "Easter Wings." Why do you think Herbert chose to write serious religious poetry in this form? Why is each poem in its particular shape? Are there other shapes that would have been effective for these two poems? Create a presentation in which you show and share your findings with the class.
4. The most celebrated English religious poet is John Milton, author of the epic *Paradise Lost* (1667). Though both writers exhibit devout spirituality, the works of Herbert and Milton are quite different in aim, scope, and method. To Milton, for example, God is revealed in the Bible, while Herbert finds God in everyday life, even in the most mundane of tasks. After finding three to five additional significant thematic and stylistic differences between the two men's works, evaluate which writer is most effective in demonstrating his faith. What criteria have you used to assess their works? Which writer do you believe offers a path to salvation for common individuals? Write a paper that outlines your conclusions.

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## Robert Herrick

BORN: 1591, London, England

DIED: 1674, Dean Prior, Devonshire, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

*Hesperides; or, The Works Both Humane and Divine* (1648)

### Overview

Almost forgotten in the eighteenth century, and in the nineteenth century alternately applauded for his poetry's lyricism and condemned for its "obscenities," Robert Herrick has, at the start of the twenty-first century, finally been recognized as one of the most accomplished English poets of his age. Scholars and critics are gradually appreciating the achievement represented by his only book, *Hesperides; or, The Works Both Humane and Divine* (1648). While some of his individual poems, such as "To the Virgins to Make Much of Time," "Upon Julia's Clothes," and "Corinna's Going a-Maying," are among the most popular of all time, recent examinations of his *Hesperides* as a whole have begun to reveal a Herrick whose sensibility is complex, subtle, and coherent.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

*Elizabethan Upbringing Marked by Tragedy*  
Herrick was born in Cheapside, London, in 1591, and



Robert Herrick *Herrick, Robert, illustration. International Portrait Gallery.*

baptized on August 24 of that year. He was the seventh child of a London goldsmith, Nicholas Herrick, and was little more than fourteen months old when his father fell to his death from a window in an apparent suicide. His mother never remarried, and it seems more than a coincidence that father figures would loom large in the poet's *Hesperides*. At the time, England was ruled by Queen Elizabeth I, who oversaw the beginnings of the British Empire as well as a golden age of drama, literature, and music.

*Educated at Cambridge* By age sixteen, Herrick was apprenticed to his uncle, but he apparently found either Sir William Herrick or the goldsmith trade undesirable, for the ten-year apprenticeship was terminated after six years. In 1613, at the comparatively advanced age of twenty-two, Herrick enrolled at Saint John's College, Cambridge. Limited means would eventually force Herrick to transfer to a less expensive college, Trinity Hall. His studies culminated in 1620 with a master of arts degree. By this time, James I had succeeded Elizabeth and established the Stuart line.

*The "Sons of Ben"* Between his graduation from Cambridge and his appointment, in 1629, as vicar of Dean Prior in Devonshire, little is known about Herrick's life. It is almost certain, however, that some of this time was spent among the social and literary circles of London. Here the budding poet at last found a surrogate father in Ben Jonson, the eminent poet, dramatist, actor, and literary lion of London. Herrick became one of several "sons of Ben" who had notable literary careers themselves. Others include Thomas Carew, Sir John Suckling, and Richard Lovelace. This group, sometimes called the Cavalier Poets by scholars, carried on Jonson's revival of classical poetic styles.

Meanwhile, Herrick was cultivating a style distinctly his own, earning a reputation as a fashionable poet. His work likely circulated in manuscript form. Some of his works were set to music by the well-known musician Henry Lawes and sung before King Charles I. Charles was the son of James I and had succeeded him in 1625. Herrick also cultivated the royal family with a series of flattering poems. Indeed, the king, though he was nine years younger than Herrick, emerges in *Hesperides* as yet another father figure.

*Country Vicar* Herrick took holy orders in 1623. This step, at the mature age of thirty-two, may indicate that he was unable to find a position elsewhere. In 1627, he became one of several chaplains to accompany George Villiers, first Duke of Buckingham, on a failed expedition to the Isle of Rhe to liberate French Protestants. In 1629 Charles I awarded Herrick for his service by nominating him to the vicarage of Dean Prior, a hamlet in Devonshire, far to the southwest of London. He was installed there the following autumn.

To become a country parson had to have been a radical change from Herrick's former life among the literary set at court. Some critics believe he resented this appointment to the remote West Country, viewing it as banishment from London. He wrote one poem

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Herrick's famous contemporaries include:

**Thomas Hobbes** (1588–1679): English philosopher, whose treatise *Leviathan* (1651) is a fundamental work of political theory.

**George Herbert** (1593–1633): Welsh-born religious poet and Anglican priest who wrote *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (1633).

**Thomas Carew** (1595–1640): An English Cavalier poet who associated with Ben Jonson and his circle of literary friends. His poetry collections include *Poems* (1640).

**René Descartes** (1596–1650): French mathematician and rationalist philosopher, often remembered for his adage “I think, therefore I am.” His books include *Discourse on Method* (1637).

**John Milton** (1608–1674): This highly celebrated English poet is most famed for the epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667).

**Charles I** (1600–1649): King of England, Scotland, and Ireland, 1625–1649. A proponent of divine right, he was convicted and executed during the English Civil War.

describing the people of his parish as “currish; churlish as the seas; / And rude (almost) as rudest savages.” He may have been exaggerating for effect, but whatever Herrick's true feelings about his congregation, he nevertheless carried out his duties faithfully for seventeen years.

**Affected by English Civil War** His service was interrupted, however, at a key moment of the English Civil War. (The English Civil War officially began in 1642 as a struggle between Charles—who believed in the divine right of kings as well as absolute sovereignty and rule—and Parliament, over their proper roles in government, though these tensions had been building for decades. Over the next few years, there were battles primarily between ultraradical Independents—also known as Puritans—like Oliver Cromwell, who wanted to do away with the monarchy and the organized church, and royalists, who wanted the monarchy to remain in power and to retain the church.) Herrick was every inch a royalist (as his poems of praise for Charles I and the royal family make evident) and a rather traditional Anglican in a part of the country sympathetic to the Puritan cause and the parliamentary forces. In 1647, Herrick and more than one hundred Devonshire clergymen were expelled from their parishes for their convictions. He returned to London and took up residence in St. Anne's, Westminster, sustained by wealthy friends and relatives.

Thus, Herrick was in London when he published his one and only poetry collection, *Hesperides; or, The Works Both Humane and Divine*. The “Divine” part of the title

refers to a smaller book of poems titled *His Noble Numbers; or, His Pious Pieces, Wherein (Amongst Other Things) He Sings the Birth of His Christ, and Sighs for His Savior's Suffering on the Crosse*. This book, appended to *Hesperides*, has its own title plate, which curiously bears the publication date 1647. Some critics believe Herrick intended to publish *His Noble Numbers* first, then realized the aesthetic value of displaying a progression from secular to religious poetry.

**Restored to Position** Shortly after *Hesperides* was published, Charles I was removed from the throne by the victorious Independents led by Cromwell. The king was executed in 1649, and Cromwell ruled England as a commonwealth until he died in 1648. Cromwell's son Richard succeeded him, but his rule was even more unpopular than his father's, and Parliament invited the return of the monarchy in 1660. The year of the Restoration, Herrick personally petitioned to be returned to his former vicarage. Charles II, the son and heir of Charles I, granted his petition and sent him back to Dean Prior in 1662, where he served until his death at the end of harvest season in October 1674. There is no verifiable evidence that he continued to write poetry in his later years.

### Works in Literary Context

More than the other “sons of Ben,” Herrick follows Jonson's prescriptions for writing well, especially by reading the ancients. Herrick often mentions, quotes, or borrows from the works of classical writers such as Anacreon, the legendary Greek poet of wine, women, and song, and with Roman poets such as Horace, Ovid, and Martial. The aspiring poet's own sensibility, Jonson counseled, should be imposed on the borrowed subjects and formal elements. Herrick obeys, in scores of classically styled epigrams, odes, and lyrics, even in imitations of Jonson himself, such as “Delight in Disorder.”

**Carefully Constructed Poetry Collection** Today most readers encounter Herrick in anthologies, a few poems at a time, as he was read when a limited number of his lyrics circulated in manuscript. When he published *Hesperides*, however, he had something else in mind. His was a rare literary feat. He seems to have been the first poet, and still the only important poet, to gather practically all of his verses (more than fourteen hundred poems) into one elaborately designed volume and see it through the presses. *Hesperides* is also the only major collection of poetry in English to open with a versified table of contents.

**Carpe Diem: Seize the Day** Among Herrick's most admired work is “Corinna's Going a-Maying,” a tightly structured lyric combining Christian and classical elements and examining mutability. Corinna is being seduced *out* of bed, to join in the ceremonies of May Day, when the townspeople go into the country to gather greenery. Lying in bed, she is warned, is a sin against the religion of nature. The final stanza reminds Corinna (and the reader) that as creatures of nature, we are all subject to time, and thus youth and love are not forever.



This is one of Herrick's recurrent themes, generally called "carpe diem," a Latin phrase meaning "seize the day." Herrick muses on the briefness of life and the importance of living it to its fullest every day. It is captured most famously in "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time," with its well-known opening "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may, / Old time is still a-flying: / And this same flower that smiles today / Tomorrow will be dying." Though a Christian priest, Herrick seems to perceive death as ultimate oblivion, without transfiguration. Like the classical Stoics, he responds to the prospect of inevitable death by affirming life, lived modestly and taken as it comes.

### Works in Critical Context

Over the past three centuries, the perceived unevenness of Herrick's poetry, its mixture of high and low forms and themes, has divided literary critics. Whereas one nineteenth-century poet, Algernon Charles Swinburne, hailed Herrick as "the greatest song-writer—as surely as Shakespeare is the greatest dramatist—ever born of the English race," Robert Southey called Herrick "a coarse-minded and beastly writer, whose dunghill . . . ought never to have been disturbed." Even so, his reputation has steadily increased with nearly every close study of *Hesperides*. Critics have uncovered complex nuances in Herrick's simple poetic style, causing them to reevaluate the country parson's genius. Today, Herrick's poetry has attained the critical renown he always knew it deserved.

**Little Acclaim in His Lifetime** The earliest known criticism appeared in *The Muses Dirge* (1625) by Richard James, who compared Herrick to Jonson and Michael Drayton. Other poets favorably mentioned Herrick, indicating that he may have enjoyed some literary popularity in his lifetime. In the absence of much evidence, it is difficult to determine the reception *Hesperides* received on its publication in 1648. The timing was unfortunate, as the Civil War took center stage.

**Critical Attention in Nineteenth Century** In the century after his death, Herrick gained only marginal recognition from English commentators. Interest revived around the turn of the nineteenth century. In 1804, Nathan Drake provided one of the first comprehensive retrospectives on Herrick, calling him instrumental in developing a trend toward simpler poetic structure. Some critics found his work too vulgar to deserve high praise, but the American commentator Ralph Waldo Emerson considered Herrick's lyrics unrivaled in diction and structure. Later in the century, Swinburne and other critics wrote favorably of Herrick, and George Saintsbury's *Poetical Works of Robert Herrick* (1893) acknowledged him as a "natural man" whose poetry is an expression of his delightful surroundings.

**Twentieth Century** Twentieth-century scholars cite a 1910 study by F. W. Moorman as pivotal to the revival of Herrick's reputation. Later critics offered fresh insights into the sources, structure, and themes of *Hesperides*. Several noted theorists, such as C. S. Lewis, T. S. Eliot, and Northrop Frye, examined Herrick's poetry in the

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Herrick's "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time" could be the most famous "carpe diem" poem in the English language. Here are other verses expressing, or questioning, the same universal theme:

"Mignonne, allons voir si la rose" (1553), a poem by Pierre de Ronsard. This French poet famously compares his reluctant lover's beauty to a flower destined to droop and wither.

"The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (c. 1590), a poem by Christopher Marlowe. A famous English pastoral love poem with romantic ideals as straightforward as its meter: "Come live with me and be my love."

"Song to Celia" (1607), a poem by Ben Jonson. A brief seduction poem from the literary patriarch of the Cavaliers: "'Tis no sin love's fruit to steal; / But the sweet theft to reveal."

"To His Coy Mistress" (c. 1680), a poem by Andrew Marvell. A strong carpe diem argument is presented in a courtly seduction poem featuring the lines: "Had we but world enough, and time, / This coyness, lady, were no crime."

"Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" (1943), by Dylan Thomas. This lament upon mortality, Thomas's most famous poem, urges the reader to "Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

course of presenting their own literary principles. Another milestone in Herrick criticism, Sydney Musgrove's *The Universe of Robert Herrick* (1950), perceives Herrick's poetry as neither "trivial" nor "pagan," but as a reflection of a seventeenth-century English Christian worldview. As he predicted, Herrick's tombstone has vanished, but at last, "the eternizing power of poetry" has brought him more admiration than he might have imagined.

### Responses to Literature

1. How well does Herrick handle the tension between his religious faith and the vivaciousness of his secular poetry? Create a presentation for the class in which you explain your point of view.
2. Some scholars have deemed Herrick to be an "occasional" poet—that is, a poet who writes about special or ceremonial occasions. Citing several of Herrick's works, identify some characteristics of this type of poetry and write a paper with your findings.
3. *Hesperides* was published at the height of the English Civil War. Study the history of this conflict and write a paper about several poems in which Herrick refers to the war or reveals a position toward it.
4. Perform a close reading of the opening poem of *Hesperides* "The Argument of His Book" in a small group. With the group, examine questions such as:



How does Herrick's view of his poetry concur with, or differ from, your own?

5. Herrick's literary mentor, Ben Jonson, championed a revival of classical styles of poetry. In a short essay, describe how Herrick emulates thematic or formal elements of classical poetry. Cite two or more specific examples.

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## James Herriot

BORN: 1916, Sunderland, England

DIED: 1995, Thirsk, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*All Creatures Great and Small* (1972)

*All Things Bright and Beautiful* (1975)

*All Things Wise and Wonderful* (1977)

*The Lord God Made Them All* (1981)

*Every Living Thing* (1992)

### Overview

James Herriot was the pen name of James Alfred Wight, a veterinarian who practiced in northern England. He began writing about his experiences with animals at the age of fifty, becoming one of Britain's most successful authors. Gentle, humorous, and heartwarming, Herriot's books, such as his first best-seller *All Creatures Great and Small*, include reminiscences about his life and career: relationships with family and colleagues, his animal patients, the farmers who owned them, and the Yorkshire countryside.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**An Idyllic Childhood** James Alfred Wight was born on October 3, 1916, in Sunderland, England, to bar and movie-house piano player James and singer Hannah Wight. Three weeks after his birth, the family moved to Glasgow, Scotland. He attended schools in the nearby town of Hillhead, where he went to Yoker Primary School and then Hillhead High School. Herriot described his childhood as "idyllic," explaining, "I spent much of my childhood and adolescence walking along with my dog, camping and climbing among the highlands of Scotland so that at an early age three things were implanted in my character: a love of animals, reading, and the countryside."

After reading a magazine article describing a veterinarian's life, Herriot decided at the age of thirteen that he wanted to be a vet. After receiving his degree from Glasgow Veterinary School, Herriot started his first job as an assistant



James Herriot Herriot, James, photograph. AP Images.

vet in North Yorkshire, England, in the practice of Dr. John Sinclair. "I hadn't thought it possible that I could spend all my days in a high, clean-blown land where the scent of grass or trees was never far away...[and] find the freshness of growing things hidden somewhere in the cold clasp of the wind... My work consisted now of driving from farm to farm across the roof of England with a growing conviction that I was a privileged person." Thirty years later, the work and the countryside would become the focal points of his books.

***A Wife's Challenge*** "The life of a country vet was dirty, uncomfortable, sometimes dangerous," Herriot wrote in *All Creatures Great and Small*. "It was terribly hard work, and I loved it. I felt vaguely that I ought to write about it and every day for twenty-five years I told my wife of something funny that had happened and said I was keeping it for the book," Herriot told *Scotsman* journalist William Foster. "She usually said 'Yes, dear' to humour me but one day, when I was fifty, she said: 'Who are you kidding? Vets of fifty don't write first books.'" Her words were the motivation he needed. "I stormed out and bought some paper and taught myself to type."

Writing proved difficult at first. "I started to put it all down and the story didn't work," he recalled to Foster. "All I managed to pick out on the machine was a very amateur school essay. So I spent a year or two learning my craft, as real writers say." His writing process included his adopting a pseudonym. "It's against the ethics of the veterinary profession to advertise and when I first started writing my books, I was afraid some of my peers might think it unprofessional of me to write under my own name," Herriot explained to Arturo F. Gonzalez in *Saturday Review*. "So, I was sitting in front of the TV tapping out one of my stories and there was this fellow James Herriot playing such a good game of soccer for Birmingham that I just took his name."

***Bright and Beautiful Success*** After four years of improving his writing skills and enduring publishers' rejections, Herriot saw the 1970 publication of *If Only They Could Talk* in England. By itself the book sold only twelve hundred copies, but this number did not accurately predict the career about to unfold. "I thought it would stop at one book and nobody would ever discover the identity of the obscure veterinary surgeon who had scribbled his experiences in snatched moments of spare time," Herriot wrote in *James Herriot's Yorkshire*. His next book, however, eliminated the possibility of his fading into obscurity.

*It Shouldn't Happen to a Vet* was published in the United States together with *If Only They Could Talk* under the title *All Creatures Great and Small*. The book was an instant best seller. It proved to be his most popular book and launched a series that included *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, *All Things Wise and Wonderful*,

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Herriot's famous contemporaries include:

**Heinrich Böll** (1917–1985): This German author is respected for his post–World War II writings as much as for his successful resistance to join the Hitler Youth movement.

**Ella Fitzgerald** (1917–1996): African American "First Lady of Song," Fitzgerald is considered one of the most influential jazz singers of the twentieth century.

**Anthony Hopkins** (1937–): This Academy Award–winning Welsh actor has portrayed many fine gentlemen throughout his career, but he is popularly known for playing the cannibalistic Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs*.

**Walter Farley** (1915–1989): Farley was the original author of the immensely popular *Black Stallion* series.

**Ted Hughes** (1930–1998): Hughes was a British poet whose work often uses animals as metaphors.

*The Lord God Made Them All*, and *Every Living Thing*. Every volume was met with great enthusiasm.

***The Last "Big" Book*** In 1984, Herriot expanded his writing to include children's stories with *Moses the Kitten*, the first of several cat stories written for young readers. Dogs have received equal billing in books including *The Market Square Dog* (1991) and *James Herriot's Dog Stories* (1995), in which many of the pieces were adapted from his previous works.

Although Herriot had told Foster and others that *The Lord God Made Them All* would be his last "big" book, he relented, and *Every Living Thing* was published in 1992, on the twentieth anniversary of the release of *All Creatures Great and Small*. The book was a best seller. Among the reviews expressing delight, Cathy Collison of the *Detroit Free Press* remarked that the book "offers more of Herriot's personal life," and concluded that it "is enough to keep the reader hoping Herriot, now retired from surgery, will turn his hand to one more volume." Unfortunately for his admirers, *Every Living Thing* was to be Herriot's last original book.

In the winter of 1995 Herriot died of prostate cancer at his home in England, leaving his son, James, also a veterinarian, and his daughter, Rosemary, a doctor. Before he died, Herriot insisted that he had everything he wanted. "If you get married and have kids, that's the main thing, isn't it?" he asked Claudia Glenn Dowling in a *Life* magazine profile. "And I've lived in this beautiful district, having the great pleasure of being associated with animals. Oh aye, it's been a marvelous life."

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by other writers who have also succeeded in offering heartwarming tales centered around animals:

*Born Free* (1960), a nonfiction work by Joy Adamson.

Readers fall in love with Elsa, a lioness that was adopted by humans when she was an orphaned cub.

*Travels with Lisbeth* (1993), a nonfiction work by Lars

Eighner. Eighner shares a provocative autobiographical tale of homelessness for man and pet.

*Marley and Me: Life and Love with the World's Worst Dog*

(2005), a nonfiction book by John Grogan. Grogan's nonfiction account of his family's life with Marley humorously describes antic after antic of the lovable, troublesome, hyperactive dog.

*Travels with Charley* (1961), a memoir by John Steinbeck.

This memoir recounts Steinbeck's drive through America with Charley, his poodle.

### Works in Literary Context

Herriot's books are largely autobiographical; although most place and character names are fictitious, they are based on real places and people. For example, master vet Donald Sinclair, Herriot's first employer, inspired the protagonist for several of his books. Herriot's works cover forty years of his life as a veterinarian in the uplands of Yorkshire, including his marriage to a farmer's daughter and his military service in the Royal Air Force during World War II. His affection for the landscape, the rugged farming population, and his patients is apparent in all his books; the volumes are laced with humorous anecdotes of man and beast, often with himself as the target of the joke.

**A Charming Reality** Based on the day-to-day realities of a gentle man, Herriot's books have almost magical soothing or healing powers in their candor, humor, and simple humility. As Mitzi Brunsdale noted, "An audience buffeted by brushfire wars, continent-spanning plagues, voice mail, E-mail, lost mail, MTV, and the Information Superhighway can still find solace in the disarming tales of a gentle veterinarian from a Yorkshire town... and a... world far removed from the horrors of the nightly news, yet as intimate as the decency and compassion of the human heart." Brunsdale further noted that Herriot's work "charms his readers with a healthy nostalgia for what used to be best in our world as well as an unquenchable hope for what we want to think—in spite of ourselves—remains a constant good in what Mark Twain called 'the damned human race.'"

**Children's Books** Herriot's later children's stories also work on charm. Short and uncomplicated, they

exude love and humor, and, at times, elicit tears. They have, in fact, the same peculiar magic that his adult fiction has, a blend, according to Mary Ann Grossmann in the *Chicago Tribune*, of "finely drawn and colorful characters, empathy for humans and animals, a good story set in a gentler time, humor, respect for uneducated but hard-working people and an appreciation of the land." Grossmann further commented, "There's something else in Herriot's writing that I can't quite articulate—a glow of decency that makes people want to be better humans. I guess we'd call it 'spirituality' these days, this profound belief of Herriot's that humans are linked to all animals, whether they be the cows he helped birth or pampered pets like Tricky Woo, a lovable but overfed Pekinese."

**Lasting Influence** Not only did Herriot reach readers all over the world with his chronicles of agricultural, medical, and veterinary industries, but his legacy lives on. His fame has fueled a thriving tourist economy in Thirsk, North Yorkshire, with such attractions as the World of James Herriot Museum, housed in the building of his vet practice.

### Works in Critical Context

Though a few critics have found his books "rather lightweight stuff," most reviewers have approved of them as warm, likable, inspirational stories of places where people take pleasure in hard work and simple living. Although the majority of Herriot's tales may be heartwarming, they contain enough of the grim realities of farm life to avoid sentimentality. Most of all, the author's affection for his subjects is clearly demonstrated, and several reviewers have concluded that in their sincere portrayal of a man who loves his chosen home and lifestyle, Herriot's books have earned their popularity.

**All Creatures Great and Small** Reviewers described *All Creatures Great and Small* as a welcome change of pace. "What the world needs now, and does every so often, is a warm, G-rated, down-home, and unadrenalized prize of a book that sneaks onto the best-seller lists for no apparent reason other than a certain floppy-eared puppy appeal," William R. Doerner wrote in *Time*. "However, it is only partly because warm puppies—along with cows, horses, pigs, cats and the rest of the animal kingdom—figure as his main characters that James Herriot's [*All Creatures Great and Small*] qualifies admirably." *Atlantic Monthly* reviewer Phoebe Adams concluded that the book "is full of recalcitrant cows, sinister pigs, neurotic dogs, Yorkshire weather, and pleasantly demented colleagues. It continues to be one of the funniest and most likable books around."

**Other Books in the Series** The popularity of *All Creatures Great and Small* prompted Herriot to continue in the same vein with *All Things Bright and Beautiful*. The *New York Times Book Review*'s Paul Showers described *All Things Bright and Beautiful* as "Herriot's

enthusiastic endorsement of a simple, unpretentious life-style,” adding, “No wonder the earlier book was so popular. Here is a man who actually enjoys his work without worrying about the Protestant Ethic; he finds satisfaction in testing his skill against challenges of different kinds. Beyond that, he delights in the day-to-day process of living even when things aren’t going too well.”

*The Lord God Made Them All*, the fourth in Herriot’s original tetralogy, “begins as if the others had never ended, the same way old friends meet again and talk, at once forgetting they have been apart,” Lola D. Gillebaard remarked in the *The Los Angeles Times Book Review*.

**Cats and Dogs** Of Herriot’s cat tales, such as *The Christmas Day Kitten*, Jack Miles of the *Los Angeles Times* said it was “simply another yarn of the sort Herriot spins so effectively, a memory shared, this time, as a doctor might share it with a child on his knee. I think the average kid would be all ears.” And of his equally appreciated dog tales, *Washington Post Book World* critic Donald McCaig wrote, “In one story, a dying woman worries that after her death she will be reunited with her loved ones, but not with her animals, because she has been told that animals have no souls. Herriot convinces her that they do, because ‘if having a soul means being able to feel love and loyalty and gratitude, then animals are better off than a lot of humans.’ I suppose there’s someone who will find this ‘soppy.’ Me, I think it’s true.”

## Responses to Literature

1. Find the hymn from which Herriot took the titles of *All Creatures Great and Small*, *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, *All Things Wise and Wonderful*, and *The Lord God Made Them All*. Why do you think Herriot chose this particular hymn as his inspiration? Think of another hymn or song that you would use if you were Herriot writing those works today.
2. Much of today’s television programming consists of reality-based shows. With this in mind, Discuss the medical emergencies that form the conflict of some of Herriot’s most intense scenes. Do you think his particular veterinary experiences and outlook on life would make for good reality television?
3. Research the career of a veterinarian. Prepare a presentation showing your findings. Be sure to include information about the education needed to pursue this profession, common duties associated with the job, and different fields or branches within the profession.

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## Hermann Hesse

BORN: 1877, Calw, Germany

DIED: 1962, Montagnola, Switzerland

NATIONALITY: German, Swiss

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Demian* (1914)

*Siddhartha* (1922)

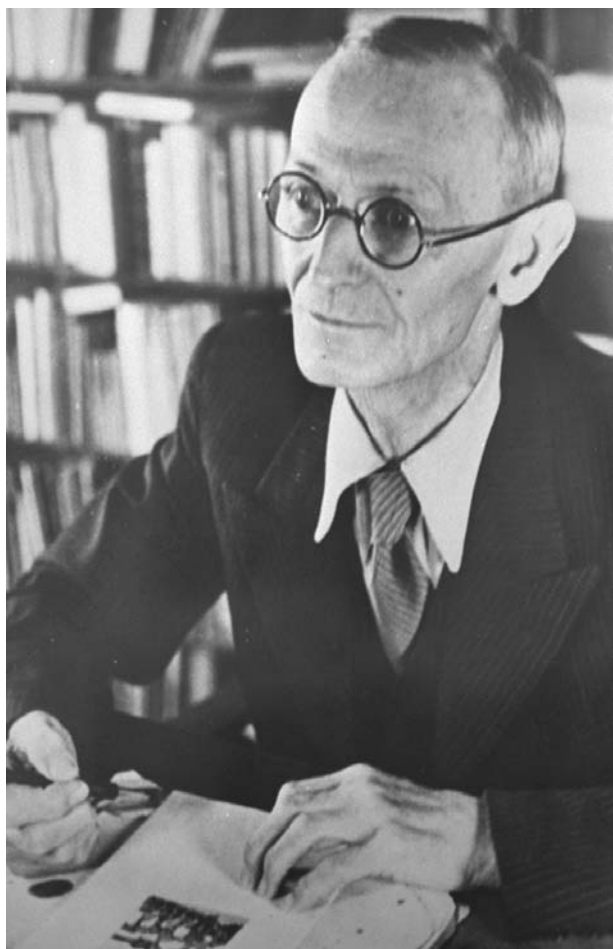
*Steppenwolf* (1927)

*Narcissus and Goldmund* (1930)

*The Glass Bead Game* (1943)

## Overview

The most-translated German twentieth-century author, Hermann Hesse’s primarily autobiographical work focused on matters of the soul. Through novels and poems that draw on Eastern philosophy and ideas of enlightenment, Nobel laureate Hesse enjoyed success both during his lifetime and during the countercultural movement of the 1960s, when a generation of authors found inspiration in his characters’ search for enlightenment outside the bounds of normal society. Contemplative, artistic, and confessional, Hesse’s work has



Hermann Hesse Hesse, Hermann, photograph. The Library of Congress.

survived as a testament to humankind's search for spiritual meaning.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Birth and Early Rebellion** Born on June 2, 1877, in a small German village, Hermann Hesse inherited his literary and spiritual interests. His father worked for a publishing house owned by Hesse's family, and both of his parents served as missionaries in the East Indies. Hesse's grandfather, Hermann Gundert, lived and worked in India, and was fascinated by the language and culture of the Far East. Gundert passed this passion on to his grandson.

In 1891, Hesse won a scholarship to a Protestant church school, but struggled with the discipline he found there. Dissatisfied, he dropped out. His concerned parents forced him into two other schools, but finally relented and allowed their son to come home in 1893 after at least one suicide attempt and time spent in a mental institution.

Though Hesse convinced his parents to let him come home, he had a harder time persuading them to let him follow his dream of becoming a writer. Instead, they forced him to become an apprentice machinist at a local clock factory. Depressed and dissatisfied with the monotonous work, Hesse dreamed of becoming a writer. In 1895, he began a new apprenticeship, this time with a bookseller in Tübingen, a town that had produced one of Hesse's poetic idols, the German lyricist Friedrich Hölderlin.

**First Poems** Supported by an indulgent boss and buried in a world of books, Hesse thrived at his job at the Heckenhauer bookshop. Inspired by the German Romantics like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Novalis, Hesse began to write poetry, publishing his first poem in 1896. Much of Hesse's early work was rooted in Romantic ideals of melodramatic fantasy. (Romanticism was a literary, as well as an artistic and philosophical movement that was a reaction against the Enlightenment and Neoclassicism. Romanticism also emphasized the individual, the personal, and the subjective, as well as the imaginative, the spontaneous, the emotional, and transcendental.) Disillusioned by modern society and moved by Romantic poetry, Hesse saw himself as a social outcast and sought out the mysteries of nature and poetry. His first two major works, however, were commercial failures, with only fifty-four copies of his *Romantic Songs* (1899) selling in two years.

Financially independent and ready to see something new, Hesse moved to Basel, Switzerland, in 1899. There, he continued to work with book dealers and made many friends among the city's intellectual and literary elite. However, Hesse was not content to stay in Basel, and in 1901 he traveled to Italy for the first time. He met Maria Bernoulli, member of a famed family of mathematicians, on a second trip to Italy in 1903. Bernoulli, who was nine years Hesse's senior, would later become his wife.

**Literary Fame** Around this time, Hesse embarked on his first important literary work, *Peter Camenzind* (1904). This highly autobiographical novel drew from Hesse's own feelings of demoralization, isolation, and bitterness. The main character, Peter Camenzind, is a frustrated writer who moves from his isolated mountain home to the city and discovers himself along the way. The novel won Hesse critical acclaim and his first taste of fame, bringing him the coveted Bauernfeld Prize and giving him the financial means to marry Bernoulli in 1904. The pair moved to their own mountain retreat in Gaienhofen, where they hoped to pursue artistic goals while living a simple, country life. However, the arrival of their first son, Bruno, in 1905 shattered these dreams, and the marriage began to suffer.

Hesse's next novel, *Beneath the Wheel* (1906), used a fictional setting to criticize Germany's harsh educational system. The novel, which follows two boys through their



careers at a school much like the seminary Hesse attended, uses both characters as a means of exploring Hesse's own personality and represents his own struggle to understand the person he was and the person he wished to become.

While in Gaienhofen, Hesse had become increasingly interested in Eastern culture and Buddhism. Eager to escape his unhappy marriage, he traveled to Asia with a friend in 1911. Hesse was shocked by the poverty and overcrowding he saw there. His plans to travel in India were interrupted by an illness, and he returned to Germany to an increasingly unpleasant married life. The couple moved to Bern, where Hesse worked on his next novel, *Rosshalde* (1913). The novel, which follows a painter and his older wife, clearly reflected Hesse's dissatisfaction with his marriage.

**Disillusionment** Family troubles were not Hesse's only stressors at the time, as World War I soon began. In 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was assassinated in Serbia by a Bosnian terrorist. Ongoing conflicts in the region as well as entangling alliances soon brought many major European countries into war. Germany, led by Emperor Wilhelm II, was allied with Austria-Hungary and Turkey against France, Great Britain, Russia, and, later, the United States. Germany hoped to gain influence, if not territory, in eastern Europe and the Balkans through these actions.

Unable to engage in armed conflict, Hesse spoke out against World War I and performed relief work for German prisoners of war. The German press condemned him as a pacifist and traitor, allegations that would color his literary reputation. By war's end in 1918, however, Germany and its allies were defeated, and some 1.6 million Germans had lost their lives. World War I also marked Hesse's first encounter with Jungian analysis in his attempt to discover the path inwards. Influenced by philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Hesse was dismayed to find the world's thirst for war reflected in himself. He tried to engage with that self and learn more about it through psychotherapy and an increased interest in religion and spirituality.

**Postwar Works** In 1919, Hesse published his fifth novel, *Demian*. He used a pen name, Emil Sinclair, and won the Theodore Fontane Prize for best debut novel, an honor he was forced to return when he admitted that he had actually written the work. The novel, which follows a young boy's destructive friendship with an older teen, used a psychological approach that differentiated it from other novels. Around this time, Hesse's marriage ended and he settled permanently in Montagnola, Switzerland.

There, he delved into his novel *Siddhartha* (1922). A reaction to both world events and the criticism he had received for his antiwar stance, *Siddhartha* was what Hesse called "the biography of a soul." The book follows a man's attempt to find inner peace as he transforms from

wandering monk to enlightened, self-realized man. Though *Siddhartha* appeared to critical favor, it did not gain true popularity until its English translation in the 1950s and 1960s, when it influenced an entire generation of American Beat poets and hippies on a search for spiritual fulfillment.

**Became Swiss Citizen** In the meantime, Hesse, still hurt by his treatment during World War I, abandoned his German citizenship and became a Swiss citizen in 1922. He entered into a short-lived marriage with Ruth Wenger in 1924, but the marriage soon ended, and he sought comfort in Zurich's jazz clubs and bars during the winter months from 1925 to 1931. However, Hesse found no relief from sex, alcohol, and jazz. Isolated and alone, he expressed his disillusionment and loner status in his 1927 novel *Steppenwolf*, a title which roughly translates as the "lone wolf." An experimental, highly pessimistic work, *Steppenwolf* deals with questions of suicide, existence, and higher realities and is thought to reflect Hesse's disappointment in his failed marriages and his unsatisfactory attempt at hedonism.

#### **Later Works Influenced by Events in Germany**

After meeting an art historian twenty years his junior, Hesse finally found personal fulfillment in a romantic relationship. He married Ninon Dolbin in 1931. This return to happiness was reflected in his next novel, *Death and the Lover* (1930). Though rejected by many critics as inferior to Hesse's other work, this more optimistic novel proved to be one of Hesse's most popular.

When Hesse began writing his next novel, *The Glass Bead Game* (1949), he had no idea it would take eleven years to complete. Hesse wrote the novel amidst growing political crises in Germany. After World War I, Germany was forced to sign the Treaty of Versailles, which forced it to cede territory and to pay billions in reparations, despite a destroyed economy. Humiliated and impoverished, Germans saw their country's standing restored when Adolf Hitler came to power in the early 1930s. The leader of the Nazi Party, Hitler infused Germany with military, territorial, and economic ambitions. These objectives were a primary cause of World War II, which officially began in Europe when Hitler invaded Poland in 1939.

Hesse was condemned by the Nazi Party for betraying his German roots and applying for Swiss citizenship. Though upset by political events, Hesse was finally fulfilled in his personal relationships and had many visitors as his intellectual and literary friends fled Germany to neutral Switzerland. *The Glass Bead Game*, which deals with a futuristic utopia, earned Hesse the Nobel Prize in 1946. It would be his last major work.

The last years of Hesse's life were relatively peaceful. He spent his time writing letters to the many young people now interested in his philosophies and novels, writing poetry, and enjoying a quiet life in Switzerland. He died in 1962 after a battle with leukemia.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hesse's famous contemporaries include:

**Adolf Hitler** (1889–1945): German fascist leader and head of the ruling Nazi Party before and during World War II.

**Bertolt Brecht** (1898–1956): German playwright known for his innovative modern theatrical techniques and epic theatrical productions. His plays include *The Threepenny Opera* (1928).

**Carl Jung** (1875–1961): Swiss psychiatrist who founded the field of analytical psychology; he is best known for introducing the idea of a collective unconscious shared by all human beings.

**Mohandas Gandhi** (1869–1948): Indian spiritual and political leader who fought for India's independence from Britain and promoted nonviolent protest.

### Works in Literary Context

As a young writer, Hesse greatly admired German Romantic poets such as Friedrich Hölderlin, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Novalis, and his early poetry reflects those influences. Over time, he also drew on the religious background given to him by his parents and grandparents, which included the Bible, the tenants of Pietism, and Eastern philosophy. In addition, Hesse maintained a lifelong fascination with fantasy and folklore, and was inspired by the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.

**Rejection of Society** Hesse's work was always influenced by ideas of solitude, isolation, and a desire to escape from modern society. In addition, Hesse was profoundly impacted by his experiences in a Protestant seminary and the writings and work of his grandfather, a renowned Orientalist. He would draw on these themes of Eastern and Western religion in works like *Siddhartha*, which follows a man as he searches for spiritual fulfillment. In his quest, Siddhartha leaves behind the society he knows. This paradoxically allows him to attain an understanding of human nature that he could not reach while living a "normal" life. In his earlier novel *Steppenwolf*, the main character, Harry Haller, views himself as a "lone wolf" who stands apart from—and even above—the rest of society.

**Search for Fulfillment and Meaning** In Hesse's work, a rejection of society goes hand-in-hand with a greater search for enlightenment and meaning. This is the main focus of *Siddhartha*, which is regarded at least as much for its philosophical ideas about enlightenment as it is for its narrative elements. *Steppenwolf*, too, is about one man's search for meaning in his life, which he finds in this case through a "magic theater" where reality becomes

difficult to distinguish from the creations of the mind. *The Glass Bead Game* pushes this theme to an extreme, postulating a branch of society that does nothing but pursue knowledge and enlightenment through books and through the mysterious game mentioned in the title.

**Influence** As the most-translated German-language author, it is difficult to estimate just how influential Hermann Hesse's work was to his generation and the ones that followed. Hesse passed on his work to a generation of poets, politicians, hippies, and countercultural icons, who used it as a means of self-exploration during the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s. He was especially embraced by Beat poets and countercultural figures such as Andy Warhol, who produced a painting of Hesse, and Timothy Leary, who felt that Hesse's works encouraged a psychedelic consciousness.

### Works in Critical Context

Response to Hermann Hesse's body of work varied during his lifetime. Currently, however, he is widely regarded as one of the masters of German literature. Hesse got off to a poor start with his first literary works, which barely sold any copies and are considered of little literary merit. Critic Joseph Mileck has described Hesse's earliest works as melodramatic and unnoticed, stating that "neither book attracted more than a modicum of attention."

**Popularity of Novels** Hesse's first novel, however, did attract attention. The autobiographical novel *Peter Camenzind* appeared to critical acclaim, winning prizes and putting Hesse's name on the map. Hesse continued to win prizes with works like *Demian*, though he had to turn down one prize because he had written the work under a pen name. *Siddhartha* is widely known as Hesse's masterpiece, but the work did not gain general critical acclaim until its publication in English in the 1950s. At that time, the work's emphasis on Eastern religion and spiritual self-discovery struck a chord with scholars and students, and it attracted much critical and popular attention.

Hesse's last major work, *The Glass Bead Game*, appeared to wide critical acclaim and garnered Hesse the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1946. The award marked a period of revived interest in Hesse's work, with more and more critics turning to his early output, and around this time Hesse began to be recognized as one of the great lights of German literature.

Though criticism and public opinion of Hesse varied during his lifetime, his writing was embraced by the English-speaking world during the 1950s and 1960s, when his works appeared in translation in England and the United States.

**Steppenwolf** Though Hesse was considered to be a major German author by the beginning of World War I, his antiwar position and renunciation of his German citizenship earned him negative critiques from patriots who felt he had betrayed Germany. His 1927 book *Steppenwolf* is widely seen as a reaction to this criticism. The

book, which includes a scene in which the main character hallucinates a conversation with Mozart, also received wide critical attention and acclaim during the 1950s and 1960s, when critics turned to it as a countercultural rejection of society complete with psychedelic elements. By the late 1990s, critics like Ritchie Robertson, writing in the *Journal of European Studies* rated the novel higher than other works by Hesse. Robertson noted that “the ambiguities of *Steppenwolf*, along with its use of multiple perspectives and mirroring techniques, make it far more interesting than the bland dualism and vaticinations of *Siddhartha*.”

## Responses to Literature

1. Hesse's work was deeply influenced by his studies of Eastern philosophy and spirituality. What other authors can you think of whose work was influenced by their religious worldview? Using the Internet and the library, write a paper about one of these authors and the influence of religion on his or her literary output.
2. Hesse is known for his focus on the individual trying to escape from society. What parts of Hesse's own experience influenced this interest in countercultural ideas? Create a presentation of your findings.
3. *Siddhartha* enjoys enduring popularity in high school and college classrooms. Compare its relevance with that of other commonly assigned books like *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), by J. D. Salinger, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), by Harper Lee. Why do you think the ideas in *Siddhartha* would be particularly appealing to young people? Write a paper voicing your conclusions.
4. Hesse was mocked and put down in the German press for his antiwar stance during World War I. Using the Internet and library, research with a partner other writers whose political views threatened their literary careers. Make a presentation of your findings, comparing and contrasting Hesse's experiences with at least two other writers.
5. Discouraged by his unpopularity in Germany, Hesse published his novel *Demian* under an assumed name. Using the Internet and your library, research other writers who published their work under pseudonyms. What reasons can you find for authors to use pseudonyms? Write a paper that outlines your findings.

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## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Hesse's *Siddhartha* explores questions of spirituality and the inner self. Here are a few other examples of works whose heroes embark on a mission of self-discovery:

*Into the Wild* (1996), a nonfiction work by John Krakauer.

This bestselling book deals with a young man's ill-fated journey into the Alaskan wilderness.

*Walden* (1854), a nonfiction work by Henry David Thoreau. Perhaps the most famous American nonfiction book of all time, *Walden* contains its author's observations and philosophical musings during a solitary time in a simple cabin in rural Massachusetts.

*On The Road* (1957), a novel by Jack Kerouac. This classic novel of the Beat Generation in America is loosely based on the real adventures experienced by the author on his road trips across America.

*The Razor's Edge* (1944), a novel by W. Somerset Maugham. This novel tells the story of a World War I fighter pilot who returns home after the war, but quickly decides to reject society's conventions and strike out on a round-the-world search for knowledge and meaning.

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## Nazim Hikmet

BORN: 1901, Salonika, Greece

DIED: 1963, Moscow, Russia

NATIONALITY: Turkish

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

*Seyh Bedreddin destani* (*The Epic of Sheik Bedreddin*) (1936)

*Memleketimden insan manzaralari* (*Human Landscapes*) (1938–1950)

*Things I Didn't Know I Loved* (1975)



Nazim Hikmet Hikmet, Nazim, photograph. AP Images.

## Overview

Nazim Hikmet is posthumously considered one of the giants of twentieth-century Turkish literature, though his poems, plays, and prose were banned in his homeland during most of his lifetime.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Early Political Activism and Trouble** Born in 1901 in Salonika, Greece (then under Turkish rule), Nazim Hikmet published his first poems when he was fifteen years old. In 1921 he went to the Soviet Union to study at the University of the Workers of the East and returned to Turkey in 1924, when he joined the Turkish Communist Party as a supporter of the rights of farmers and workers. A year later, after publishing his first political poems, he was sentenced to fifteen years in prison, so he fled back to the Soviet Union. In 1928 he again returned to his homeland and worked on the progressive periodical *Resimli Ay* (*Pictorial Monthly*).

**From Prison to Exile** Hikmet found himself in and out of prison between 1928 and 1933. The offending actions or affronting works that caused Hikmet's continual incarceration remain vague, and sources contradict each other. For instance, in 1938 Hikmet was sentenced to thirty-five years in jail either for inciting military cadets to rebel, for his antifascist poem "Madrit kapilarinda" ("At the Gates of Madrid"), or for his long poem "Seyh Bedreddin destani" ("The Epic of Sheik Bedreddin"). Regardless of the specific charge, Hikmet remained in prison until 1950.

There are also contradictory accounts surrounding the end of his prison time in Turkey. Some sources say he was released and sent into exile in the Soviet Union. Others credit a dramatic escape from Istanbul to Moscow through Romania. It is certain that in 1950 he left Turkey for the Soviet Union. He was stripped of his Turkish

citizenship but given a hero's welcome in the Soviet Union. From 1950 until his death in 1963, Hikmet lived both in the Soviet Union and in other socialist countries. He emerged as a prominent figure in the peace movement of the European left, lending his poetry to the cause of Communism. He remained critical of the rising political reaction in Turkey, but also grieved over his forced separation from the country that continued to provide inspiration for his poetry.

## Works in Literary Context

Hikmet's poetry, often compared with that of American poet Walt Whitman, is credited with revolutionizing Turkish verse by challenging its traditional forms: Hikmet introduced modernist techniques—including the use of broken lines and a style influenced by street vernacular—and confirmed contemporary issues as legitimate thematic material. "Free verse with alternations of short and long lines, occasional rhyming, and wide use of alliteration, assonance, and onomatopoeia, a staccato syntax, were to remain the hallmarks of his art and his major influences on modern Turkish poetics," wrote Talat Sait Halman in *Books Abroad*. Because of his verse's impact, Hikmet was the first Turkish poet to establish an international reputation.

**Poetry and Marxist Politics** Hikmet's poetry, inseparable from his Marxist politics, drew admiration and applause from some of the foremost intellectuals and artists of the century, from Jean-Paul Sartre and Bertolt Brecht to Pablo Picasso and Pablo Neruda. Hikmet was remarkably successful in bringing poetic lyricism to politics. His populist patriotism, and passionate but critical commitment to the Communist promise, found expression in a poetry that is as striking for its musical qualities as it is for intense visual aesthetic.

His poems ranged in genre from the poetry of love composed for his many mistresses to epic works, such as *The Epic of Sheik Bedreddin* and *Human Landscapes*. The poems drew their power not just from a superb use of Turkish free from pedantic ornamentation, but also the sensibility that he brought to his politics, in which sadness played against defiance, tenderness against toughness, and a deep sense of the vagaries of life against his utopian hopes for the future.

**Love for Nature and Humanity** Hikmet wrote volumes of short pieces, many of them concerned with his love for nature, for his fellow human beings, and for his wife, Piraye. Critics note that Hikmet's loves were what fueled his communism and not a logical or economical appreciation of theoretical politics. "His communism never appears cold and doctrinaire but seems a natural outgrowth of his love for people, his desire that humankind grow in love and cooperation and his deep reflection on life and living—and beneath it all he is himself a loving, hurting, feeling human being," judged Walter G. Andrews in *World Literature Today*. Another reviewer

wrote, “The composite picture of Nazim Hikmet . . . is that of a man with a total commitment to life. He is in love with nature’s splendors as well as the machine age . . . When he wrote of human love and tragedy in lyric and dramatic terms, he was a great modern poet by any and all criteria.” “What emerges from his poems,” wrote Mutlu Konuk in the introduction to *Things I Didn’t Know I Loved: Selected Poems of Nazim Hikmet*, “is his human presence; the strongest impression that we get from his poetry is a sense of Hikmet as a person.”

“I conceive of art as an active institution in society,” Hikmet once said. “To me, the artist is the *engineer of the human soul*.” Hikmet also once said, according to *Village Voice Literary Supplement* contributor Don Shewey, “Living is no laughing matter, we must live as if one never dies.”

### Works in Critical Context

The most notable critical response to Hikmet’s poetry came from the Turkish government, which banned his writings for most of his lifetime. Exiled from Turkey after twelve years of imprisonment, Hikmet was virtually unknown in his homeland, but when he died in 1963, he was a prominent figure in international literary circles. Much of his work was only published in Turkey many years after his death, and he has more and more been regarded as one of Turkey’s greatest poets.

**Human Landscapes** Hikmet’s most ambitious project was written while he was imprisoned between 1938 and 1950: a five-volume poem titled *Memleketimden insan manzaralari* (*Human Landscapes*) that was published, as is true of much of his work, only after his death. In the poem, Hikmet crafts what one critic called “a sprawling, episodic saga of the twentieth century.” Originally conceived as an encyclopedic survey of modern Turkish life, the poem, consisting of nearly twenty thousand lines, touches on a range of themes, cinematically painting the portraits of individuals drawn from all segments of Turkish society. A *Publishers Weekly* contributor called *Memleketimden insan manzaralari* “a grand, impressive, sophisticated work, rich in dramatic incident and varied in tone and language.” Robert Hudzik, writing in *Library Journal*, found that “Hikmet’s ability to particularize the general helps make this a bold, remarkable work.” The *Hudson Review* wrote, “Hikmet has an uncanny way of bringing characters to life in a few lines so vividly that, whether they are scurrilous or noble, one can’t help but care about them. . . . His special gift is to show that every human life is a story, and a compelling one.”

### Responses to Literature

1. Hikmet was jailed and censored in Turkey because the government considered his communist ideas to

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hikmet’s famous contemporaries include:

**Bertolt Brecht** (1898–1956): Brecht was a German playwright and theater director whose writings and productions significantly influenced twentieth-century theater.

**Ernest Hemingway** (1899–1961): Hemingway was an American writer who is considered one of the greatest influences on twentieth-century literature.

**Salvatore Quasimodo** (1901–1968): Quasimodo was an Italian author considered one of the most important Italian poets of the twentieth century; he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1959.

**Jaroslav Seifert** (1901–1986): Seifert was a Czech writer who was a leading member of the Czechoslovakian avant-garde; he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1984.

**Walt Disney** (1901–1966): Disney was an American animator and entrepreneur who was one of the most influential figures in twentieth-century entertainment.

**Pablo Neruda** (1904–1973): Neruda was a Chilean writer and politician associated with the international Communist movement; he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1971.

**Jean-Paul Sartre** (1905–1980): Sartre was a French philosopher who was a leading figure in the existentialist movement.

be dangerous to the country. Do his ideas still seem dangerous from today’s perspective? Would a writer producing such works today face the same repressive treatment?

2. Hikmet wrote many poems on the theme of his love for nature and for humanity. In what ways were his communist ideas fueled by this love? Do his expressions of love fit consistently within the system of his communist ideas, or are there contradictions and points of tension? Explain.
3. Through his poetry, Hikmet was able to turn common people’s lives into compelling stories about humanity, history, and current issues. Using his poetry as a model, write a poem or short story about a common person that tells a larger story.
4. Hikmet’s works were banned in Turkey throughout much of his life, and he was frequently jailed for the ideas expressed in his poetry. Do you think a government has a right to control the products of its nation’s authors? Write an argumentative essay supporting your position on this question.



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Hikmet's poetry often depicted the suffering created by repressive governments and hailed the promises of communism, which promoted sharing of wealth among all citizens. Here are some other works written for these purposes:

*El tungsteno* (1931), a novel by César Vallejo. This social realist novel depicts the oppression of Peruvian miners by foreigners.

*Mother* (1907), a novel by Maxim Gorky. This socialist realist novel tells the story of a man and his mother who transform into revolutionaries.

*Cement* (1925), a novel by Fyodor Gladkov. This novel shows the struggles of workers rebuilding their lives after the Communist revolution in Russia.

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## Rolf Hochhuth

BORN: 1931, Eschwege, Germany

NATIONALITY: German

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Deputy* (1963)

*Soldiers* (1967)

*A Love in Germany* (1968)

*The Midwife* (1971)

*Lawyers* (1979)

### Overview

Rolf Hochhuth is widely considered one of the most controversial German playwrights of the 1960s. Some of his plays have been challenged by the Catholic Church, while others have been banned by the British parliament. Besides being severely criticized for his choice of subject matter, Hochhuth has had his writing dismissed as historically inaccurate and derided as technically inept. Yet several of his plays have effected sig-

nificant social and political consequences and continue to enjoy public popularity.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***Reluctant Hitler Youth*** Hochhuth was born on April 1, 1931, in Eschwege, east of Kassel, Germany, to shoemaker and manufacturer Walter Hochhuth and his wife, Ilse Holzapfel Hochhuth. After being forced to close his shoe factory in the Depression, in 1932, Hochhuth's father managed the wholesale business of his wife's family.

The family had liberal leanings in politics, though the young Hochhuth was an unenthusiastic member of the Hitler Youth. The Hitler Youth were a paramilitary arm of the Nazi Party whose membership included older teenage boys, and after 1936, all eligible German boys had to join the group. Hitler took power in Germany in the early 1930s, and imbued the floundering country with pride through massive military expansion and aggressive territorial ambitions. Under Hitler's dictatorship, Germany forced the beginning of World War II in Europe by invading Poland in 1939. Hitler's actions determined Hochhuth's early life to such an extent that he now, ironically, calls Hitler his father.

***The Success and Failure of The Deputy*** After leaving school at the Realgymnasium of Eschwege early, Hochhuth became a bookseller's apprentice in Marburg, Kassel, and Munich. In 1955, he became a reader for the Bertelsmann publishing house, and in 1957, he married Marianne Heinemann, a former schoolmate. They had two sons.

Hochhuth's first and best known play was *The Deputy* (1963). Starting in 1959, Hochhuth worked on the play daily, using records of the events at Auschwitz (the largest concentration camp where Nazis took Jews to complete the goals of the Holocaust; over 1.1 million people were killed there), the testimony of witnesses he interviewed in Rome, the accounts of Nazi officer Kurt Gerstein (who tried to sabotage the mass murders of Jews), and secondary sources on the Vatican's attitude regarding the deportation of Roman Jews. The play was completed in 1961, but fears of legal action by the Vatican prevented its publication. A prize for promising young authors was awarded for it in 1962, but its future was still in doubt until H. M. Ledig-Rowohlt of the Rowohlt publishing house decided to publish it. Ledig-Rowohlt showed the proofs to the producer Erwin Piscator, who agreed to stage it. It caused a tempest of controversy in Western Europe and North America.

*The Deputy* points to the failure of the Vatican—specifically Pope Pius XII—to speak up about, and possibly halt the Holocaust. Before the first performance, the secrecy surrounding the play and excerpts leaked from it stirred up an atmosphere of impending scandal. After



Rolf Hochhuth Hochhuth, Rolf, photograph. AP / Wide World Photos. Reproduced by permission.

positive response from audiences on opening night, the first production ran for 117 performances in Berlin and then toured to 21 cities in Germany. The next season there were 13 productions in Germany, reaching a total of 504 performances. In France, the play was even more popular, with 346 performances of Peter Brook's production. Other early versions were staged in Sweden, Switzerland, Great Britain, and the United States.

In Rome, however, the play was almost banned. The Catholic Church—shaken by the threat of losing its moral authority—considered legal action against Hochhuth for antichurch utterances or for libel of a dead person. Then it started a campaign that led to serious public disorder in Basel. On seeing how the Swiss defended his freedom of speech against six thousand Catholic and right-wing demonstrators, Hochhuth moved with his family to Riehen, near Basel. In the long run, the church had to take Hochhuth seriously. They released materials from the Vatican archives and began looking more critically at Pius XII, who had up to then been thought a candidate for canonization. Because the Catholic Church was a pillar of the West German state (created after World War II when Germany was divided into two countries: the Western democracy of West Germany and the Soviet-influenced East Germany) and interdependent with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the ruling party, the ecclesiastical scandal was also a threat to the government.

**The Wrong Effects** In his next play, *Soldiers* (1967), Hochhuth tried to give Winston Churchill—as the man responsible for ordering the bombing of Dresden—the same treatment he had given Pope Pius XII. (Churchill had been Great Britain's leader for much of World War II. In 1945, he played a key role in ordering the bombing of the German city of Dresden, in which 527 bombers spent two days essentially annihilating the city. There

were also casualties in the thousands.) When Sir Laurence Olivier accepted the play for an English-language production at the National Theatre in London, *Soldiers* caused a controversy in the British press because of its view of Churchill. It was banned by Lord Chamberlain (a chief officer of the royal household in the British government), whose office as censor of plays was abolished as a consequence of the affair. Thereafter, the play had its biggest success in London, with 122 performances.

The play had no noticeable effect, however, on the regulation of aerial warfare—a subject important to Hochhuth, who was shocked by indiscriminate bombing during the Vietnam War (a conflict in Vietnam in which the United States tried unsuccessfully to ensure the country would not fall into the control of Communists). Hochhuth had started writing the play in order to press for the extension of the Geneva conventions to aerial warfare. He had apparently intended it as a contribution to the attacks on American strategy in Vietnam, but this aspect was little discussed in connection with the play.

**Message about America** In 1968, in response to civil unrest in America, the murders of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. and presidential candidate Robert Kennedy, the Vietnam War, Richard Nixon's election as president, and the rise in Germany of the extraparlimentary opposition, Hochhuth started work on *Guerillas* (1970). The material of the play was seen as worth a dramatic exploration, but too many problems with the work rendered it ineffective—including the grand scale Hochhuth chose, the melodramatic events and sensational incidents the playwright attempted to cover, and the intrusions of theory. In the early 1970s, Hochhuth's personal life was also transformed. He divorced his first wife in 1972, and was married again to a medical student, Dana Pavic, in 1975. The couple later had one son.

**Improved Dramatic Construction** In *Lawyers* (1979), Hochhuth returned to the formula of his first plays. As did many others, Hochhuth maintained his criticism of post-World War II politics and law in Germany. In *Lawyers*, he focuses on the fact that no German lawyer was ever prosecuted after 1945 for anything he did under Hitlerian laws. In fact, attorneys were exonerated because they were “only obeying orders”—whereas the same defense was rejected when it was used by military personnel. The play could have ended the career of a leading Christian Democratic Union (CDU) politician Hans Filbinger, but Hochhuth let some of his evidence out beforehand in an advance extract published in the newspaper *Time* of a narrative work, *A German Love Story* (1980). Hochhuth, who had just moved from Basel to Vienna, was sued by Filbinger for five hundred thousand marks in damages.

**Additional Protests** In *Judith* (1984), Hochhuth reworked the subject matter of *Guerillas*. The work was found to be rambling, containing inconclusive discussions

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hochhuth's famous contemporaries include:

**Alvin Ailey Jr.** (1931–1989): The American modern dancer and choreographer who founded the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

**Edward M. Kennedy** (1932–): The United States senator from Massachusetts known both for his liberal political stance and as the younger sibling of two slain brothers—president John F. Kennedy and senator Robert F. Kennedy.

**Günter Grass** (1927–): German novelist and playwright and Nobel laureate whose 2006 admission that he was a member of the Waffen-SS, an elite Nazi military group, stirred an international controversy.

**Toni Morrison** (1931–): The American author and winner of both the Pulitzer and Nobel Prizes. Her novels include *Beloved* (1988).

on the ethics of assassination, offering improbabilities from the world of the cheap thriller, and suffering from a parade of topics Hochhuth was fixated on. In *Summer 14* (1989), Hochhuth offered an argument aired in the notes to *Judith*. That the arms race produces war and that there are parallels between the increase of armaments in the 1980s and the growth of the German armed forces before 1914. The argument of *Summer 14* was found, again, to be inconsistent.

**Continued Complaints and Demands** Hochhuth continued to produce original plays as well as essays and nonfiction in the 1990s and early 2000s, though none have matched the importance or popularity of his early works and few have been translated into English. Later works include *Heil Hitler* (2001) and *McKinsey kommt* (2003). The latter is a play that focused on the problems of capitalism in postwar Germany. He continues to reside near Basel.

### Works in Literary Context

Much of Hochhuth's work is directly influenced by the author's experiences in and the outfall from World War II. In addition to dubbing former Nazi leader Adolf Hitler his father, Hochhuth drew on what happened to Germany in the postwar period and the lack of consequences for actions taken during the conflict. While realism, historicism, and even current events were important to the author's works, he also employed symbolism, myths, and metaphysical aspects as well. Thus many of Hochhuth's dramas are thesis plays; that is, they have a strong political message and focus on contemporary problems.

**Shocking Style** Hochhuth's style relies heavily on shock value to express his convictions. The strength of his two first plays, for example, lay in their eliciting reactions of shock from the audience to historical events and the actions of historical personages. His third play, *Guerillas*, even puts forth the suggestion that the audience will be shocked by the undemocratic nature of the United States.

**Controversial Presentation of Themes** Hochhuth's coverage of vital themes has been controversial to the point of being scandalous. This is demonstrated in plays like *The Deputy*, for instance. Since 1945, various dramatists have dealt with the crimes of the Hitler era, mainly in highly symbolic, mythical, metaphysical, or philosophical ways. In narrative literature, a more realistic approach has often been used, though only prose works like Gunter Grass's *The Tin Drum* (1959) have attracted mass attention. *The Deputy* is an attempt at what is called in German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*—managing, or coming to terms with, the past.

**Hochhuth's Wide-Reaching Influence** Despite or because of the controversial critical attack on Pope Pius XII in *The Deputy*, no other postwar German drama reached out as this one did to influence people who never visited a theater. Much of the discussion, to be sure, left the play itself to one side, addressing matters Hochhuth had not raised, such as whether papal protest would have hastened the end of the Nazi regime. But none of it would have happened without the catalyst provided by Hochhuth.

The greatest effect comes when Hochhuth—a militant pessimist—attacks. Twice, with his attacks on Pius XII and on Hans Filbinger, Hochhuth signaled changes of direction in West German society and helped to strip away conspiracies of silence. His plays have been at their most effective when he has seized on a historical cover-up or a social injustice and presented it in a direct and realistic way.

### Works in Critical Context

Hochhuth's plays have received little critical praise. From a literary perspective, the consensus is that he is incapable of structuring a play, of writing dialogue that is not impossibly wooden, or even of thinking clearly about the kind of aesthetic effect he intends. With *Guerillas*, for instance, critics pointed to a plot overloaded with sensational incidents that distract attention from the political analysis, supposedly shocking social injustices that never appear onstage, cheaply introduced sex, and shallow characterizations.

But whatever their artistic failings, a number of his plays have had direct social and political consequences. At least three have had considerable success with the public—regardless of the critical issues with either the topics or the treatment of those topics. This success is demonstrated, for example, in such plays as *The Deputy*.

**The Deputy** Critics almost universally found that no previous post–World War II dramatic work shook the conscience of Europe as did Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy*. Such critics noted that where other playwrights gave sophisticated artistic presentations of nothing much, Hochhuth gave a depiction of important subjects that was sneered at by experts but capable of keeping the audience arguing for hours after the curtain fell. As David Boroff wrote in the *National Observer*, "Though it is both flawed and arguable, it has restored seriousness to the Broadway theater. Not since *Death of a Salesman* or *The Diary of Anne Frank* have audiences been so profoundly shaken."

Literary critics, glad of a serious political subject to write about, paid much attention to the accuracy of Hochhuth's treatment but had no criteria other than Hochhuth's own historical notes for judging it. Such discussions tended to increase the respect paid to his qualities as a self-taught historian. There also has been much argument as to whether Hochhuth portrays Pius XII fairly. Some critics have expressed the wish that the theme had been treated more competently, though no other writer had thought of treating it at all. Others believe that much of the depiction of Nazism should be omitted as irrelevant to the plot. Walter Kerr, drama critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, agreed that the work is flawed, but he, too, concluded, "We are also left with the aftermath of *The Deputy*, making a clamor in the world which may, hopefully, become the equivalent of a call to prayer. Any virtues the work possesses are extra-theatrical. They may indeed become virtues."

## Responses to Literature

1. Hochhuth's *The Deputy* is centered on working out a proper moral response to Nazism. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about the response of the German people to the rise of the Nazi Party. Were they all enthusiastic? Did some resist Nazi activities? How? What consequences might a resistor face? As a group, discuss how you think you would have reacted if you were a German civilian in Germany during the late 1930s and 1940s.
2. Read a Hochhuth play that has been censored by some group or government. Highlight specific parts of the play that you think might have prompted its censorship. Do you think the censors were right to try to block the play? Do you think censoring a work of literature serves a productive purpose? Or does it serve only to make the work of literature more intriguing to readers?
3. Hochhuth's play *The Deputy* highlights a phenomenon of worldwide significance. He shows that during the Holocaust there were cultures that were quiet or intentionally neglectful about the atrocity, and afterward there were many people who denied it ever happened. Investigate Holocaust denial, look-

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also explored political or social injustice as major themes:

*Anthem* (1938), a novel by Ayn Rand. In this work the author presents a dystopian (anti-utopian) society where socialism, or collectivism, rules.

*Johnny Got His Gun* (1939), a novel by Dalton Trumbo. This story is told from the point of view of World War I American soldier Joe Bonham, who loses his arms, legs, eyes, nose, and ears in battle and must learn to exist and communicate quite differently than he did before.

*The Satanic Verses* (1988), a novel by Salman Rushdie. This work, which centers on Muhammad as he is "tricked" by Satan, elicited death threats against its author.

*Red Azalea* (1994), a memoir by Anchee Min. In this autobiographical work, the author recounts her biggest challenge, in which she was forced to choose between self-will and the will of the Chinese Communist Party.

ing into the arguments of such Holocaust deniers as David Irving. What supportive evidence do these people offer to insist there was no such occurrence? Provide a list of examples of the "evidence." What is the Holocaust denier's purpose? What does he (or she) gain from this argument?

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## ■ Fritz Hochwaelder

BORN: 1911, Vienna, Austria

DIED: 1986, Zurich, Switzerland

NATIONALITY: Austrian

GENRE: Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Strong Are Lonely* (1943)

*Donnerstag* (1959)

*Holocaust* (1960)

*1003* (1963)

### Overview

A significant German-language dramatist who is not widely known outside Europe, Fritz Hochwaelder wrote well-crafted plays that center on weighty moral issues. His plays are conventionally structured, emphasizing plot, fully developed characters, and thematic unity, and they appeal to both the intellect and the emotions.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Driven to Write** Fritz Hochwaelder was born May 28, 1911, in Vienna, Austria, to Leonhard Hochwaelder, an upholsterer, and Therese Koenig Hochwaelder. To escape capture and persecution by Nazi soldiers, Hochwaelder fled his homeland after the invasion of the German army in 1938. Like other Austrians, he entered Switzerland illegally, where he then spent time in refugee camps. Unfortunately, Hochwaelder's parents, like millions of Jews and Soviet prisoners of war (POWs), did not



Fritz Hochwaelder *Imagno / Getty Images*

escape the genocide of the Holocaust. They both died within the confines of the Nazi-run Terezienstadt concentration camp in what is now the Czech Republic. Because Hochwaelder was categorized as a non-citizen in Switzerland and therefore barred from seeking employment, he decided to concentrate on writing plays instead.

### *World War II: Accepting the Reality of Atrocity*

Hochwaelder's play *The Strong Are Lonely* (1942) was a major success in several European countries during the 1940s. Like most of his early works, this play explores universal themes through historical settings. *The Strong Are Lonely* is based upon the rise and fall of a utopian Jesuit settlement in Paraguay during the eighteenth century. The settlement is ordered to disband by both religious and secular officials; Father Alfonso, the protagonist and head of the settlement, acquiesces to authority, but he later realizes that he should have trusted his own conscience rather than let others decide his fate. The emphasis on the consciences of the individual over the conscience of a nation is a theme that develops directly out of the problems the world faced during World War II. The truth that people had to face and accept was that the atrocities that led to the deaths of so many during that war and the upheaval of Hochwaelder himself were committed not by countries but by individuals who chose to follow the imperatives of their superiors. Although Hochwaelder was never able to repeat the initial success of *The Strong Are Lonely*, his subsequent plays were well received, and he continued writing solidly composed works until his death in 1986.

**Post-World War II Theater** After the end of World War II, views on traditional German drama within the literary community shifted significantly. Much of the postwar drama produced during this period reflects these changing sentiments, with playwrights treating traditional German theater as passé, unable to stimulate social improvement or critical thought. The Germans were eager to perform imported works from America, England, France, and Italy. Hochwaelder was disturbed by dependency on foreign drama, techniques, and philosophy: He was equally concerned that the German theater was not producing enough of its own drama and—except for Bertolt Brecht—was not exerting a truly international dramatic influence. Hochwaelder criticized the German theater by comparing it to a tubercular patient, outwardly a sun-tanned picture of blooming life, but on the inside a moribund creature hastening to the grave. Generous subsidies to the theater by the cities and states suggest vigor, yet inwardly the theater is dying because it has intellectualized the drama instead of having encouraged vital, absorbing plays. His criticism was leveled at German drama in general, but it was especially applicable to the contemporary trend of the theater of the absurd. Where the theater of the absurd claimed that existence is meaningless because man is born and dies without a choice, Hochwaelder's philosophy maintained that life does have



a meaning because man is rational. Where the theater of the absurd usually resists the traditional structure of imitation, Hochwaelder's technique for the most part creates the illusion of reality through a lifelike stage setting. Hence, the drama Hochwaelder produced during this time differed significantly from that of his contemporaries.

**Exploring Guilt through Drama** Fritz Hochwaelder presented unusual twists of religious and moral themes in *Das heilige Experiment* and most of his later plays. According to Frederick Lumley, the Viennese-born playwright first attracted attention in 1952 when *Das heilige Experiment* was presented in Paris, where it "caused an immediate stir through the relationship of its theme with that of the worker-priest controversy then topical." *The Inn* (1955) is considered a transitional work in Hochwaelder's career, initiating his increasing interest in contemporary topics. Hochwaelder's later works display his skill with various types of drama, including comedy, mystery, social criticism, and plays based on legend. *The Inn*, about a corrupt usurer who is suddenly forced to account for his actions, is one of several later plays that explore guilt. In *The Raspberry Picker* (1965), Hochwaelder depicts a group of Austrians who repress their guilt for having profited from a nearby concentration camp. *Lazeretti or the Saber-Toothed Tiger* (1973) focuses on the problem of terrorism in its portrayal of hypocrites whose actions counter their professed ideals.

Critic Lumley summarizes Hochwaelder's constant experiment both in ideas and form; the play *1003* (1963), for instance, has only two characters—the author and his imagination, with the author in the process of losing his creation, who seems more alive than himself. The development of Hochwaelder, Lumley notes, "makes him not only an important dramatist for the German-speaking theater, but together with Duerrenmatt and Frisch, also living in Switzerland, and Peter Weiss, another 'exile' living in Sweden, it may be said that the most interesting living dramatists anywhere today are to be found in these [four] representatives of the German language." Three of Hochwaelder's plays have been published in Buenos Aires, and several in Paris.

Hochwaelder died of a heart attack in Zurich on October 21, 1986; although he lived most of his life after World War II in Switzerland, he was buried in Vienna.

### Works in Literary Context

Predominant influences on Hochwaelder's theater include traditional classical drama, the work of George Kaiser, the atrocities of World War II, and, above all, the Viennese theater. Hochwaelder's works characteristically focus on a secure protagonist who experiences a devastating moment of self-realization. According to Alan Best, "The shock of self-recognition, the trauma of coming to terms with an identity one did not even suspect in one-

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hochwaelder's famous contemporaries include:

- Jackson Pollock** (1912–1956): American painter known as one of the leaders in the abstract expressionism movement.
- Pierre Boule** (1912–1994): French author who wrote the novel *Planet of the Apes* (1963).
- Arthur Lewis** (1915–1991): Saint Lucian economist who was the first black to win the Nobel Prize in Economics.
- Masaki Kobayashi** (1916–1996): Japanese film director whose film trilogy, *The Human Condition* (1959–1961), explores the effects of World War II on a Japanese pacifist.
- Isaac Asimov** (1920–1992): Russian-born science fiction author who wrote the novel *I, Robot* (1950).
- Alistair MacLean** (1922–1986): Scottish author who wrote the novel *The Guns of Navarone* (1957).

self, underlines Hochwaelder's dramatic message: no one is safe from such a moment of unmasking."

**The Viennese Theater** The Viennese *Volkstheater* stems from two basic sources: the baroque Jesuit drama of the seventeenth century, which presented metaphysical truths through the senses by means of plays rather than by intellectual discourses, and the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, which was noted for its improvisations, fantasies, parodies, and *Hanswurst* (that is, vulgar and gluttonous) figures. Hochwaelder, influenced especially by the Jesuit theater, aimed to combine theatrical experience and understandable truth. He believed that the ideal theater should combine life's serious and comic sides.

**War, Militarism, and Violence** Hochwaelder's plays display a hatred of war, militarism, and violence. They also call for a regeneration of man. Personal enlightenment and regeneration are possible and even attainable in many of Hochwaelder's dramas. Outer conflicts, however, caused by external forces such as the church, the state or society, are never completely resolved. The lesson, however, that an individual is capable of interior change is meant to be a positive message to the audience.

### Works in Critical Context

Hochwaelder's dramatic output after *The Strong Are Lonely* has not been accorded the same critical acclaim as his earlier plays. Thus, the playwright's reputation rests mainly on the uncompromising humanism of *The Strong Are Lonely*.

**The Strong Are Lonely** Initial responses to *The Strong Are Lonely*, which critic Douglas Russell describes

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Hochwaelder's dramas often revolve around issues of morality and, ultimately, guilt. Here are some other works that explore similar themes:

*Crime and Punishment* (1866), a novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. After murdering a cantankerous pawnbroker, Raskolnikov, the protagonist, is overcome with guilt and experiences physical illness until he is at last punished for his crime, at which point he becomes well again, both physically and emotionally.

*Oedipus Rex* (429 BCE), a play by Sophocles. Oedipus, the main character in this play, unknowingly kills his father and marries his own mother. When he discovers what he has done, Oedipus, guilt-stricken, blinds himself.

*Atonement* (2007), a film directed by Joe Wright. In this movie—an adaptation of the Ian McEwan novel of the same name—young Briony Tallis falsely accuses her sister's lover of molesting one of their cousins. This false accusation ultimately leads to the death of the accused and a lifelong rift between the two sisters. Briony bears the guilt of her childhood lie the rest of her life.

as “a brilliant look at power politics and ethics,” tended to privilege its moral vision in the wake of the Holocaust. In recent years, however, scholarly audiences have moved toward reading Hochwaelder's work as both a mode of philosophizing and a piece in a literary tradition. Sarah Stanton and Martin Banham, for example, observe, “His most successful play, *The Strong Are Lonely*, uses the destruction of the autonomous Jesuit state in 18th-century Paraguay to discuss spiritual and religious utopias and the right of pacifism to self-defence.” In a more literary vein, Mary Garland notes, “Structurally and in the presentation of arguments the play follows the traditional idealist tragedy and ‘Ideendrama’ [drama of ideas].”

### Responses to Literature

1. Do you believe Hochwaelder's representation of his characters' psychological change in *The Strong Are Lonely* is realistic? Why or why not? Use examples from the text to support your response.
2. How would you describe the moral dilemma represented in Hochwaelder's *The Fugitive*? How do you think it should be resolved? Explain your answer in a short essay.
3. Compare and contrast Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* with Hochwaelder's *The Inn*.

Whose description of the feelings of guilt do you find more believable? Why?

4. Discuss Hochwaelder's interest in the French Huguenot wars as settings for drama.

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## Peter Hoeg

BORN: 1957, Copenhagen, Denmark

NATIONALITY: Danish

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*The History of Danish Dreams* (1988)

*Smilla's Sense of Snow* (1992)

*Borderliners* (1993)

*The Woman and the Ape* (1996)

### Overview

The most recognized contemporary Danish writer on the international literary scene, Peter Hoeg gained widespread acclaim for his second novel, *Froken Smillas fornemmelse for sne* (1992; translated as *Smilla's Sense of Snow*), which was sold to publishers in more than thirty countries. In the United States the novel spent twenty-six weeks on the *New York Times* paperback best-seller list, and both *Time* and *Entertainment Weekly* chose it as their 1993 book of the year. In his works, Hoeg questions the cultural and political values of modern Denmark, particularly as they relate to the struggle between individuality and societal conformity, values that he believes have detrimental effects on the lives of Danish children.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***A Young and Very Friendly Pirate*** Peter Hoeg was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, on May 17, 1957, the son of Erik Hoeg, a lawyer, and Karen Kjellund, a classical philologist. He graduated from Frederiksberg Gymnasium in 1976 and went on to study literary theory

at the University of Copenhagen, where he received his master of arts degree in 1984. Before devoting himself to full-time writing, Hoeg performed in classical ballet, acted, taught acting, competed as a professional fencer, and worked as a crewman on pleasure boats. One interviewer described Hoeg as “en ung og meget venligtsindet pirat” (a young and very friendly pirate). An extensive traveler, Hoeg often entertains audiences with stories of his mountain-climbing adventures or his travels throughout Africa. Hoeg’s wife, Akinyi, is a native of Kenya. They live with their two daughters in Copenhagen and make frequent trips to Kenya to visit Akinyi’s family.

Hoeg was twenty-five years old when he began his first novel, *Forestilling om det tyvende århundrede* (1988; translated as *The History of Danish Dreams*, 1995), which he worked on for six years, rewriting one chapter twenty times and discarding hundreds of pages. In one interview, Hoeg referred to this early book as his apprenticeship in writing. Danish critics were quick to praise the work, and some have called it the most significant novel debut of the 1980s.

**Embracing Genre Fiction** Nonetheless, Hoeg’s work did not reach an international audience until he wrote his second novel, *Smilla’s Sense of Snow*. Although it may not appear so to Anglo-American readers, whose introduction to Hoeg came with this work, Hoeg’s second novel signals a departure from his previous work. With *Smilla’s Sense of Snow*, Hoeg entered the world of genre fiction, specifically the thriller.

When *Smilla’s Sense of Snow* first appeared in the United States in 1993, it led sales for all translated novels that year. Both popular and literary magazines printed positive reviews of it, and the National Public Radio program *Talk of the Nation* featured the novel on one of its call-in shows. All of this attention was not entirely welcomed by the author. Since the publication of his first novel, Hoeg has maintained that he is not interested in fame. After the worldwide success of *Smilla’s Sense of Snow*, however, Hoeg’s popularity in Denmark reached celebrity status. He grew reluctant to give interviews, and in those that he did give he often complained of having to hide his private affairs and to keep his address secret.

**The Writing Process: A Search for Serenity** After the fanfare surrounding *Smilla’s Sense of Snow*, Hoeg expressed a desire to return to the calmness of his life outside Copenhagen and work on his next project, a novel titled *Borderliners* (1993; translated version published in 1994). In various interviews, Hoeg has described his process of writing a novel as a matter of quiet intensity, usually lasting two years, during which he works every day, striving to remain “totally focused and totally relaxed, to save any buildup of tension.” Called “otherworldly calm” by one interviewer, Hoeg insists on periods of obscurity for the sake of his work.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hoeg’s famous contemporaries include:

**Isabel Allende** (1942–): Chilean novelist who utilizes magic realism in her books. Allende is perhaps best known for her novel *The House of the Spirits*.

**Gabriel García Márquez** (1928–): Colombian novelist and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature.

**John Lennon** (1940–1980): A singer in the influential rock band The Beatles. Lennon was murdered at the age of forty.

**Princess Caroline of Hanover** (1957–): An aristocrat born in the same year as Peter Hoeg. Princess Caroline, since her father’s death in 2005, is next in line, after the currently reigning Prince Albert, to take the throne in Monaco.

**Saddam Hussein** (1937–2006): The president of Iraq from 1979 until 2003. He was executed on December 30, 2006, for crimes against humanity.

To this day, Hoeg continues to produce work in his slow methodical way, producing more and more complex novels as his talent grows.

### Works in Literary Context

Methodical in his research and in his application of literary traditions, Hoeg’s work has been seen as a continuation and tweaking of traditional detective novels and the reimagining of magic realism.

**Magic Realism** The narrative of *The History of Danish Dreams* encompasses four centuries and weaves the history of four families until they eventually mesh into one family. Their story is described in a series of dreams. Written in the style of magic realism, this novel often recounts stories of the fabulous in a detached, matter-of-fact manner. Grandmother Teandor, for instance, has the power to read the future, and her predictions of deaths, births, and divorces are printed in the family-owned newspaper and read by Danish citizens who believe that her predictions are infallible. Anna Bak, the daughter of an Evangelical priest, has the ability to duplicate herself, and her second self reaches out and heals people. Her father takes her power as a sign that she will bear the Messiah, and he tells everyone of his conviction until Anna’s child is born and turns out to be a girl.

**A Twist on the Detective Novel Genre** The first of Hoeg’s novels to be translated into English, *Smilla’s Sense of Snow* is told in the first person by Smilla Qaavigaaq Jaspersen, a half-Inuit/half-Danish glaciologist who lives in Copenhagen. Smilla stumbles upon a conspiracy when

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Hoeg is on record as saying one of his major concerns in writing *Smilla's Sense of Snow* was accurately portraying what it is to be a "Greenlander." Here are some works that deal with identity, individuality, and ethnicity:

*Pocho* (1970), a novel by José Antonio Villarreal. In this text, Villarreal follows the development of Richard, the son of Mexicans who immigrate to the United States when he is very young. As Richard grows, he begins to understand that while he is both Mexican and American, he feels distance from both Mexicans and Americans, sensing, in essence, that neither culture fully embraces or explains his own perspective on the world.

*The Human Stain* (2000), a novel by Philip Roth. In this novel, the light-skinned African-American Coleman Silk, for emotional and financial reasons, passes himself off as white for the majority of his life, until at last he is accused of racism in his later years.

*The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (2006), a film directed by Ken Loach. This moving film, set in the 1920s, explores the conflict between two Irish brothers who take different personal and political positions on the question of Ireland's independence.

she investigates the death of a neighbor boy who has fallen from the snow-covered roof of their apartment building. The intrigue eventually takes Smilla to Greenland in search of a mysterious and valuable object, which is also sought after by a host of minor characters.

In its outline, *Smilla's Sense of Snow* certainly fits the traditional detective novel, but in many other ways it transcends the genre. Smilla, for instance, strikes many readers as a fascinating and unusual sleuth. An expert on glaciers, a loner who reads Euclid for fun, her ruminations on mathematics and philosophy would seem dry if it were not for her wit and the way in which Hoeg uses her background to delineate her character and move the plot along. Smilla's erudition comes into play at crucial moments, such as when she sees Isaiah's footprints in the snow and determines from subtle clues that he was not playing on the rooftop of a Copenhagen apartment building but was most likely being chased. At other times her background allows her to explain her own character, as when she refers to the German mathematician Georg Cantor's concept of infinity to show why she values her personal space, the English philosopher Bertrand Russell's definition of pure math to indicate why she feels confused about cooking, or an Inuit legend to clarify her relationship with her mother.

Furthermore, Smilla's background figures prominently in the development of certain themes. The daugh-

ter of a Greenlandic mother and a Danish father, Smilla has spent the early part of her childhood in Greenland with her mother, a nurturing woman who could hunt as well as any man. While Smilla was still a child, her mother died during a hunting trip, but the adult Smilla has vivid memories of her. These scenes reveal the mother's tenderness for her daughter and the simple but harsh lives of Inuit people. In an interview with Jes Stein Pedersen for *Smilla's Sense of Snow: The Making of a Film by Bille August, Adapted from the Novel by Peter Hoeg* (1997), Hoeg said that he tried to portray Greenlanders as realistically as possible. "The book has a subtly shifting view of Greenlanders. I have tried my best to render it unsentimental. There are so many ridiculously romanticized images of the Third and Fourth Worlds which completely forget the harshness that characterizes living conditions in such places."

**Hoeg's Legacy** Although the assessment of his influence on contemporary Danish literature must be considered incomplete, his existing books have already raised the standards for other Danish writers. In terms of craft, linguistic ability, and scientific knowledge, he has made something new out of the novel. Perhaps most remarkably, however, Hoeg has managed to draw a wide audience and his books have thus had success in the elite literary community as well as in the broader commercial market.

### Works in Critical Context

Hoeg has enjoyed a devoted following from the very beginning. His first novel was considered a tremendous and important debut work. Despite the enthusiasm of Hoeg's supporters, however, he has also been the recipient of criticism. For instance, many critics found little to fault in *Smilla's Sense of Snow*, but the conclusion of the work troubled a number of readers. Writing for the *Parisian Review*, Pearl K. Bell complained about the sudden shift in the novel from the themes of the murder case and corporate corruption (which are consistent with the thriller genre) to the dangers of the meteorite, the existence of strange parasitic worms, and the evil plot of a ruthless scientist (which are more typical of science fiction). Still other critics considered the ending ambiguous and unsatisfying.

**Smilla's Sense of Snow** After a year on the best-seller list in Denmark, *Smilla's Sense of Snow* reached U.S. readers. Writing in the *New Republic*, Brad Leithauser noted that the plot of *Smilla's Sense of Snow* is typical of a thriller in its use of a small event leading to the discovery of a conspiracy. Such a plot, he remarked, "presents a monumental task to a writer bent on presenting it with artistic freshness." Leithauser commented that the author overcomes this obstacle, maintaining that "this is a task that Peter Hoeg handles with great deftness. Everything in the story seems to build simultaneously." While calling the "sinuous turns of his story deeply engrossing,"



Richard Eder of the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* faulted the work's ambiguous finale: "The book's only real weakness is an ending that doesn't live up to what has gone before and that fails to satisfy, not our emotional expectations, but our logical ones. It is not a matter of anti-climax . . . but of not quite making sense."

Still, the critical and audience response to *Smilla* was overwhelmingly positive. The novel won several prizes in Denmark, including De Gyldne Laurbær (The Golden Laurels), a prestigious award given by the Danish book-sellers to the author of the year. Current world sales for *Smilla*, which has been translated into thirteen languages, are estimated at nearly 40 million copies.

## Responses to Literature

1. Critics have been divided over the ending of *Smilla's Sense of Snow*. Do you find the conclusion of the novel "unsatisfying" and "ambiguous"? Why or why not? What effect do you think Hoeg was attempting to achieve with the ending and its dramatic shift from the rest of the novel?
2. Some critics focused on character instead of plot in *Smilla's Sense of Snow*. They found Smilla so complex and interestingly drawn that any problems with the plot seemed beside the point. Do you agree? Why or why not? Provide examples of other works that feature an equally compelling protagonist.
3. Using the library and the Internet, research the term "Renaissance man." In your opinion, do there exist any "Renaissance men" or "Renaissance women" today? If so, who are they and how do they qualify? If not, why do you think there are none today? Considering Hoeg's diverse background and the research he has done for his novels, how do you think Hoeg compares to other "Renaissance Men?"
4. The literary tradition is filled with successful writers who, like Peter Hoeg, are reluctant celebrities. Can you think of other famous writers who avoid the press whenever possible? Why do you think writers, in particular, tend to not embrace celebrity?

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## Homer

BORN: *c. eighth century BCE*

DIED: *c. seventh century BCE*

NATIONALITY: *Greek*

GENRE: *Poetry*

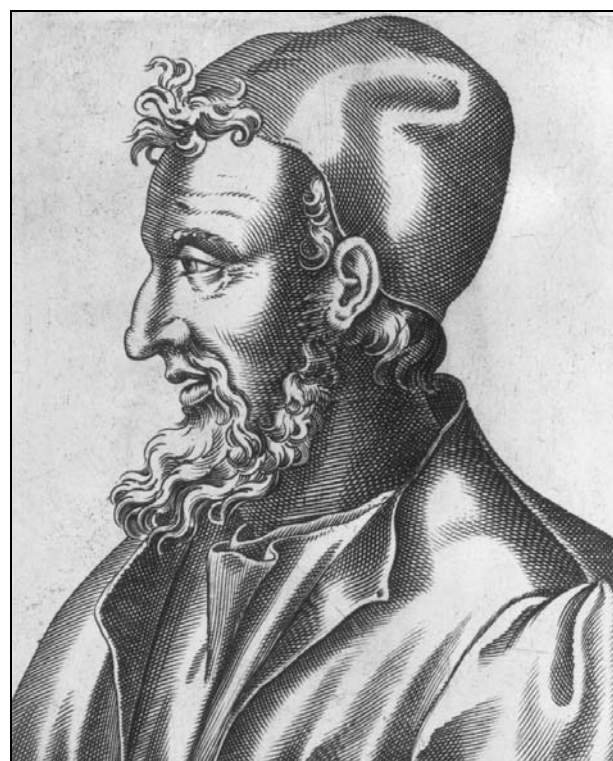
MAJOR WORKS:

*The Odyssey*

*The Iliad*

## Overview

Homer is generally considered the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the two greatest epics of European literature. The poems celebrate the values of ancient Greek civilization, incorporating many ancient myths and folk motifs and examining such themes as heroism, fate, honor, loyalty, and justice. Admired over the centuries for the artistic mastery they demonstrate, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have exerted a profound influence on all later Western poetry and have served as the primary models for subsequent epics. Although critics do debate the exact authorship of the two poems, questioning whether Homer was the poems' originator, their most famous bard, or even just a name representing the tradition of singing the poems themselves, there is little question that these two works have been two of the most influential in



Homer Hulton Archive / Getty Images



## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Homer's famous contemporaries include:

**Lycurgus** (c. 700–c. 630 BCE): Legendary Spartan king who established the militaristic foundations that would build the city-state into one of the greatest of the Greek powers.

**Romulus** (c. 771–c. 717 BCE): Mythical founder of the city of Rome. After slaying his twin brother Remus, Romulus not only founded the city but began many of its most ancient traditions, such as the senate and the Roman legions. Although he is often regarded as mythological, there remains some debate as to whether Romulus may have been a real, historical figure.

**Hesiod** (c. eighth century BCE): Generally thought to have lived well after Homer, Hesiod is considered his equal in importance. His poetry spans a wide range, from everyday life to the creation of the universe, and is a vital source of understanding ancient Greek life and beliefs.

**Alcmaeon** (?–c. 753 BCE): Last hereditary *archon* (ruler) of Athens. Upon his death in 753, the office of archon became an elected position.

**Sennacherib** (ruled c. 705–c. 681 BCE): Conqueror of Babylon and invader of Judah; he was famously unable to take Jerusalem, as described in the Bible and his own personal accounts.

Western history, working their way into centuries' worth of art in all genres.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**An Uncertain Existence** Almost nothing is known about the life of Homer himself. He was most likely an Ionian Greek, probably from the coast of Asia Minor (in modern-day Turkey) or one of the adjacent islands, who lived in approximately the eighth century BCE. According to legend, he was blind and made a living as an itinerant bard. It has been suggested that his purported blindness may have been used to conceal his illiteracy, or that he may have lost his sight only late in life. Biographies of Homer exist in the form of six early “lives” and various commentaries written by Byzantine scholars, but these are generally considered unreliable. Although the ancient Greeks, from the fourth century BCE or so on, developed a lively tradition of art and scholarship responding to the work of someone they clearly considered to be a historical personage, modern scholarship has raised a number of questions about Homer's very existence. Some have even suggested that the *Odyssey* attributed to Homer was actually the work of a young Sicilian woman. Nonethe-

less, “the poet Homer” remains—as a concept—a convenient way of getting a handle on two of history's greatest poems, giving us a name to associate with the work.

**The Trojan War** The Trojan War figures prominently in both of Homer's epic poems. According to legend, this was a battle fought between the people of Troy, located on the coast of Asia Minor, and the people of Greece. Although records suggest that the ancient Greeks believed the war to be an actual historical event, very little archeological evidence has been found to confirm this. If the battle did indeed take place in the centuries prior to Homer's existence, it likely bore little resemblance to the battle depicted in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. That said, the poems certainly derive their vigor from a real historical context. Even if the Trojan War itself was not a historical fact, the tensions between the Trojan and Greek cultures were quite real, and the legendary Trojan War serves to explain why the two societies were at odds.

### Works in Literary Context

The scarcity of information regarding Homer and his relation to the works attributed to him has prompted much scholarly inquiry, bringing together experts from the fields of archeology, linguistics, art, and comparative literature. Even more, though, scholars and artists in every century since the works' emergence have responded—in philosophy, poetry, painting, sculpture, novels, and more—to both the content and structure of Homer's poems, with the result that these works now have tremendous cultural resonance. It is rightly said that echoes of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* may be found in nearly every work of literature in the Western canon.

**Beginning the Textual Tradition** The *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, it is generally agreed, evolved from oral folktales about a great war and a great hero. The oral versions of the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* were transmitted by local bards from generation to generation and eventually were written down on papyri, most likely after Homer's death. Once set down in writing, the poems probably became the exclusive property of the Homeridae, or “sons of Homer,” a bardic guild whose members performed and preserved the poems. In the second half of the sixth century BCE, the Athenian dictator Peisistratus established a Commission of Editors to edit the texts of Homer's poems and remove any errors or digressions accumulated in the process of transmission. The first printed edition of Homer's works appeared in Europe only in 1488, however, and remained in use until the seventeenth century; since then, there have been numerous other translations, in both prose and verse.

**A Contradictory Simplicity** The language of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* represents a bit of a contradiction. On the one hand, in a perfectly plain and direct manner, the

narrator carries the action forward, examining the events in great detail and occasionally digressing from the main narrative, but always in such a manner that the course of the tale seems completely natural and inevitable. On the other hand, the epic language of the poems was never used for everyday communication. It is a stylized language made up of formulas, noun and adjective combinations having metrical values that fill certain segments of a dactylic hexametric poetic line. The dactylic hexameter, one long syllable followed by two short syllables (for which another long syllable can be substituted), is possibly an inheritance in Greek from an earlier Indo-European poetic language. In any case, the epic language seems to be based on creative combinations of phrases rather than of individual words. Readers of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are likely to remember expressions such as “the wine-dark sea,” “Menelaus of the loud war cry,” or “swift-footed Achilles.”

***Repetition and Orality*** A great part of the narrative of the poems is made up of repeated phrases of a given metrical value. Modern-day readers are sometimes put off by what they consider the heavy, dragging effect of the repeated phraseology, but this reaction simply marks the great difference between literate and oral cultures. What is heard in repetition becomes part of the texture of the continuous utterance and does not have the prominence that the reader assigns to each word as he or she reads it from the printed page—at varying speeds, depending on his or her concentration or reading ability. Oral poetic narrative is in this sense more like late-twentieth-century rap music, the language of which is both repetitive and shaped and delivered by the singer. Unlike the written poem, the speed of delivery is more in the control of the performer than the listener, and it is thus by repetition principally that the singer makes the words accessible to his or her audience.

***Bedrock of Western Literary Tradition*** It would be almost impossible to overstate the influence that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have had on Western culture. Informing works ranging from the ancient Roman Virgil’s *Aeneid* to the Renaissance Englishman John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* to Irish modernist James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, “Homer’s” epic poems form the bedrock of the Western tradition in literature.

### Works in Critical Context

A breakthrough in Homeric studies came in the 1920s, when Milman Parry argued that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were composed orally. Parry proved that the poems were formulaic in nature, relying on generic epithets (such as “wine-dark sea” and “rosy-fingered dawn”), repetition of stock lines, and descriptions and themes typical of oral folk poetry. Suggesting that Homer was most likely a rhapsode—an itinerant professional reciter—who improvised pieces to be sung at Greek festivals, Parry deduced that Homer probably learned to weave together threads

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The works of Homer participate in a tradition of tales of heroism and tragedy set against a legendary, mythological past, a tradition that may be found in the literatures of many different cultures, even in the present day. Some prominent examples are:

*Aeneid* (first century BCE), an epic poem by Virgil. This work picks up where Homer’s tales leave off, telling the tale of the Trojan Aeneas, his eventual journey to Italy, and his victory over the tribe of the Latins. In writing this poem, Virgil explicitly connected Rome’s past to the heroic age of Greece.

*Dr. Faustus* (first published in 1604), a play by Christopher Marlowe. This masterpiece of Elizabethan playwright Marlowe features two appearances by the spirit of Helen of Troy, summoned by the magician Faust.

*Ulysses* (1922), a novel by James Joyce. Often considered a foundational text for the literary movement known as modernism, Joyce’s masterwork traces a very unheroic Leopold Bloom through the course of an ordinary day—an ordinary day carefully structured along the lines of Ulysses’ (Odysseus’s) journeys and travails in the *Odyssey*.

of standard epic plot in order to sustain his narrative, relying on mnemonic devices and phrases to fill the poetic lines. Still largely accepted today, Parry’s theory stresses the derivative and evolutionary character of Homer’s poetry, but also affirms Homer’s individual genius as a shaper of traditional poetic elements into works that far exceed the sum of their borrowed parts.

***Disputed Authorship*** In the Classical period it was commonly assumed that Homer was the sole author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Scholars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, became embroiled in a lengthy debate—referred to as “the Homeric question”—about whether both poems were written by the same author. Though each epic contains a number of inconsistencies and factual lapses, each also exhibits a remarkable degree of structural, stylistic, and thematic unity. Critics are not surprised to encounter inconsistencies in the poems, given their oral beginnings and spontaneous transmission through recitation; however, that line of argument has not disproved Homer’s authorship of the two poems. The dispute continues, however, and today’s scholars believe, on the basis of internal evidence, that the *Iliad* was probably written much earlier than the *Odyssey*, though there is not quite enough evidence to prove that Homer did not write both poems. Several other poems, including the *Margites* and the *Batrachomyomachia*, have also been attributed to Homer, but they were most likely written by his successors and popularizers.

***The Iliad and the Odyssey in Contemporary Perspective*** Modern Homeric studies focus—as past ages have done—on purely textual exegesis, on parsing the fine meanings of words and the most accurate translations, but they also look at the sociocultural and political messages in the work. For instance, Dean C. Hammer argues, “The *Iliad* is not simply a reflection of, but a reflection on, the nature of political authority. The nature of this reflection suggests a fundamental shift in the type of political questions asked, from the ‘power of authority’ to carry out decisions suggestive of Dark Age politics to the legitimacy of authority in making these decisions, a question critical to the formation of an increasingly interdependent polis form of political organization.” Other scholars focus on how best to teach Homer’s text, focusing, for instance, on the Perseus Digital Library, which, writes Professor Anne Mahoney, “is useful here, because it allows students who do not know Greek to work intelligently with the Greek text.”

## Responses to Literature

1. Odysseus forms a common thread through both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Compare and contrast how he is portrayed in both works. Does he change over time? How do his actions and personality differ between the two stories?
2. Virgil’s *Aeneid* takes a minor character from the *Iliad* and creates a “sequel” describing his fate after the Trojan War. Choose another minor character and do the same thing—create a story describing the character’s life and adventures after the fall of Troy. Research the world of ancient Greece and use that knowledge in the story.
3. Homer’s view of the gods and humanity’s role in the cosmos is fundamentally a bleak one: humans are essentially pawns in the wars and rivalries of the gods. Why do you think the ancient Greeks imagined their gods as behaving like humans, subject to the same emotions? What limits do the gods have to their powers? Is there something appealing about this view of the cosmos?
4. What can you infer about Greek cultural customs from Homer’s works? How did the Greeks treat strangers and guests? What did they value most?

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## Gerard Manley Hopkins

BORN: 1844, Stratford, Essex, England

DIED: 1889, Dublin, Ireland

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

“The Wreck of the Deutschland” (1875)

“Thou art indeed just” (1889)

“Pied Beauty” (1918)

“The Windhover” (1918)

## Overview

Frequently dealing with religious themes and evoking imagery from nature, the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins are distinguished by stylistic innovations, most notably his striking diction and pioneering use of a meter he termed “sprung rhythm.” Because his style was so radically different from that of his contemporaries, his best poems were not accepted for publication during his lifetime, and his achievement was not fully recognized until after World War I.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

### *Religious Childhood and Introduction to the Arts*

The oldest of Manley and Kate Hopkins’s nine children, Gerard Manley Hopkins was born in Stratford, Essex, England, and raised in a cultured and religious environment. Both parents were readers and devout High



Gerard Manley Hopkins    Hopkins, Gerard Manley, photograph.

Church Anglicans; his father also taught Sunday School and was a published poet.

At grammar school, Hopkins excelled in his courses, especially painting and writing. Though he wanted to be a painter, he eventually made a shift from the visual to the verbal. The young poet's verses were filled with colorful pictorial images characteristic of Victorian word-painting. In 1863 Hopkins obtained a scholarship to Oxford University. There he pursued his interests in poetry, music, sketching, and art criticism, established important friendships, and, most importantly, came under the influence of John Henry Newman, an important Catholic educator.

Hopkins was educated during what is known as the Victorian era of the United Kingdom. During the rule of Queen Victoria, a ruler known for expanding the British Empire and catalyzing the Industrial Revolution, England experienced immense prosperity. The literature produced during this period bridges the Romantic period with twentieth-century literature; it was during this period that the novel became the most significant literary form.

**Leaving the Church of England** After months of soul-searching, Hopkins resolved to leave the Church of England and become a Roman Catholic, which led to a permanent estrangement from his family. He graduated from Oxford in 1867, and in the spring of 1868, he decided to become a Jesuit priest. He burned all his early

poems, vowing to give up writing and dedicate himself fully to his religious calling. After his ordination in 1877, Hopkins served as a priest in London, Oxford, Liverpool, and Glasgow parishes and taught classics at the Jesuit Stonyhurst College. In 1884 he was appointed a fellow in classics at the Royal University of Ireland and professor of Greek at the University College in Dublin. As time passed, he became progressively more isolated, depressed, and plagued with ill health and spiritual doubts, particularly during his years in Ireland.

**Sprung Rhythm** After destroying his early poems, Hopkins wrote essentially no poetry for nine years. But, in 1875, with the approval of his superior, he returned to writing verse, strictly limiting the time he spent on composition. The first work Hopkins produced after he resumed writing, "The Wreck of the Deutschland" (1875), is an account of the widely publicized loss at sea of a German ship, in which he also examines his spiritual struggles. In this poem, Hopkins introduces his revolutionary sprung rhythm.

Unlike conventional poetic meter, in which the rhythm is based on regular alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables, the meter of sprung rhythm is determined by the number of stressed syllables alone. Thus, in a line where few unstressed syllables are used, the movement is slow and heavy, while the use of many unstressed syllables creates a rapid, light effect. "The Wreck of the Deutschland" also introduces the central philosophical concerns of Hopkins's mature poetry, reflecting both his belief in the doctrine that humans are created to praise God and his commitment to the Jesuit practices of meditation and spiritual self-examination.

**Nature Poetry** Hopkins continued to experiment with style, language, and meter. He is perhaps best known for his shorter poems on nature, many of which were written in the early years of his priesthood. In such celebrations of natural beauty as "Pied Beauty," "God's Grandeur," and his best-known sonnet, "The Windhover," Hopkins strove to capture the essence of creation as a means of knowing and praising God. For most of his contemporaries, however, nature existed only to be exploited, as the effects of the Industrial Revolution consumed the wilderness. This apparent disappearance of God from nature in the nineteenth century inspired some of the didacticism that pervades Hopkins's later nature poetry.

**The "Terrible Sonnets"** Hopkins's last works, known as the "terrible sonnets," express spiritual struggle. These consist of the six original "terrible sonnets" of 1885—"Carriage Comfort," "No worst, there is none," "To seem the stranger," "I wake and feel," "Patience," and "My own heart"—and three sonnets of 1889—"Thou art indeed just," "The Shepherd's Brow," and "To R. B." Most of these poems focus on *acedia*, the fourth deadly sin, the sin of "spiritual sloth" or

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hopkins's famous contemporaries include:

**Robert Bridges** (1844–1930): Bridges, an English poet and poet laureate in 1913, was friends with Gerard Manley Hopkins and assembled Hopkins's posthumous first volume of poetry.

**Charles Darwin** (1809–1882): In 1859, this English naturalist published *On the Origin of Species*, a book that highlights his theory of evolution through variation and natural selection.

**John Fowler** (1826–1864): Fowler, an English agricultural engineer and inventor, developed a much faster method of plowing fields, enabling more land to be cultivated than previously possible.

**William Morris** (1834–1896): Morris, an English artist and writer, founded the British arts and crafts movement, which originated as a reaction against the mass production made possible by the Industrial Revolution.

**Christina Rossetti** (1830–1894): English poet and sister of the artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti; she is best known today for her poem "The Goblin Market."

"desolation." In others he works toward a resolution of his spiritual questionings. Although Hopkins feared that his poetic power was declining in his final years, the terrible sonnets are highly regarded by critics for his unguarded self-revelation and mastery of the sonnet form.

In 1889 Hopkins died in Dublin, Ireland of typhoid fever, apparently caused by the polluted urban water supply. He is buried in Glasnevin cemetery. None of Hopkins's major works were published in his lifetime. He submitted a few of them to periodicals and anthologies, but they were rejected. Following Hopkins's death, Robert Bridges, his literary executor, arranged for a few of his simpler works to appear in verse anthologies. The selections by Hopkins in these works received little notice, however, except in Catholic circles, where "Heaven Haven" and "The Habit of Perfection" were praised for their religious content.

### Works in Literary Context

As a young writer, Hopkins had several great influences. The poet Christina Rossetti became for Hopkins the embodiment of the pre-Raphaelites and Victorian religious poetry. In the 1860s he was profoundly influenced by her example. Both Hopkins and Rossetti believed that religion was more important than art. The outline of Hopkins's career followed that of Christina Rossetti's: an outwardly drab, plodding life of submission quietly

bursting into splendor in holiness and poetry. Both felt that religious inspiration was more important than artistic inspiration: Poetry had to be subordinated to religion.

During the early 1870s, Hopkins began to study the teachings of the thirteenth-century Franciscan scholar John Duns Scotus. From Duns Scotus's teaching of the "thisness" of all things, Hopkins developed the concepts of "inscape," a term he coined to describe the inward, distinctive, essential quality of a thing, and "instress," which refers to the force that gives a natural object its inscape and allows that inscape to be seen and expressed by the poet. These teachings are what inspired Hopkins to write again.

**Sprung Rhythm** Many of Hopkins's poems are noted for their musical rhythm. His use of sprung rhythm was new and quite different from that of his contemporaries. However, Hopkins claimed that his meter of sprung rhythm appears in classical literature, Old English and Welsh poetry, nursery rhymes, and the works of William Shakespeare and John Milton. Moreover, he valued it as "nearest to the rhythm of prose, that is, the native and natural rhythm of speech."

By using sprung rhythm, Hopkins recovered the rhythms of early English prose, with its two-beat phrases held together by stress patterns within and between phrases, its dependence on rhythm more than syntax to determine meaning, and its stringing together of main clauses connected by *and* and *but*. Just as Hopkins's poetry was influenced by Old and Middle English alliterative verse, his prose was influenced by early English prose. Understanding Hopkins's relationship to medieval prose and verse traditions helps to lead us to the heart of Hopkins's literary achievement. He brought poetry closer to the rhythm of prose.

In addition to experimenting with meter in this poem, Hopkins employed several other poetic techniques for which he is known. His diction is characterized by unusual compound words, coined phrases, and terms borrowed from dialect. He adds more complexity by adding intentional ambiguities and multiple meanings. In addition, he frequently utilizes elliptical phrasing, compression, internal rhyme, assonance, alliteration, and metaphor.

### Enduring Reputation as an Innovative Stylist

Hopkins has been the subject of numerous studies undertaken from a wide range of critical perspectives, and though a few commentators maintain that he is essentially a minor author because of the narrowness of his experience, he is now regarded as one of the greatest poets of the Victorian era. Acclaimed for his powerful influence on modern poetry, Hopkins continues to be praised as an innovative and revolutionary stylist who wrote some of the most challenging poems in the English language on the subjects of the self, nature, and religion.



## Works in Critical Context

Because much of Hopkins's work was not published during his lifetime, his critics did not emerge until Bridges compiled and published *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, the first collection of the poet's works. A few reviewers of the collection praised Hopkins's expression of religious feeling, but the predominant response was one of bewildered incomprehension.

***A Model of Stylistic Originality*** In the 1920s, the poems found a small but select following among such writers as Laura Riding, Robert Graves, I. A. Richards, and William Empson. Early proponents of a close reading of the poetic text, these critics valued the complexity of Hopkins's works and his stylistic originality.

The 1930s saw an enormous growth of interest in Hopkins's works. In 1933 literary critics Joseph Sheed and Maisie Ward, writing for *Form in Modern Poetry*, describe the fate of Hopkins's work in deterministic terms, citing his genius as the reason for the late discovery of his work, "Hopkins is only just emerging from the darkness to which his original genius condemned him. It is a familiar story; nothing could have made Hopkins's poetry popular in his day: it was necessary that it should first be absorbed by the sensibility of a new generation of poets, and by them masticated to a suitable pulp for less sympathetic minds." In that decade his letters and personal papers were first published, together with a second, enlarged edition of the poems. Among the young poets of the 1930s, Hopkins was revered as a model. His influence is evident in the works of writers as diverse as the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas, British poet W. H. Auden, Irish poet Cecil Day Lewis, and American poet Robert Lowell.

With the centenary of Hopkins's birth in 1944, numerous critical essays and appreciations appeared, and since that time his works have continued to attract extensive analysis. However his work as a whole has consistently resisted categorization. Critic Alan Heuser acknowledges this while offering a suggestion in his critical essay "The Shaping Vision of Gerard Manley Hopkins" (1958), "Placing Hopkins's poetry in the English poetic tradition has been found a difficult task. . . . If a distinct label is needed, perhaps 'baroque' is almost satisfactory, expressing the vehement and fiery incarnation of idea in word-made-flesh, the word rendered sensational." Hopkins's writings have proved highly suited to New Critical approaches, which emphasize explanation and interpretation of individual poems with particular attention to their style, rhythm, and imagery. His poems have also received the examination of poststructuralist and deconstructionist critics, who consider his use of deliberately ambiguous language of profound interest.

Recent scholarly publications on Hopkins's work reveal the endless possibilities for interpretation his work affords. Examining the scientific context of his day, critic Marie Banfield describes Hopkins's poetry as reaching far

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Hopkins's poems about nature explore its mysterious beauty and see the hand of God in its creation. Here are some other works that examine nature and ways of considering it:

"Nature" (1836), an essay by Ralph Waldo Emerson. In this work, the American philosopher explores how the divine can be discovered through nature.

*Refuge* (1991), a memoir and natural history book by Terry Tempest Williams. A Mormon naturalist tells of the flooding of a bird refuge on the Great Salt Lake in Utah, and her mother's death from cancer, linked to nuclear testing in a nearby state.

*Remarkable Trees of the World* (2002), a photography book by Thomas Pakenham. This work includes sixty photographs of extraordinary trees from Europe, Africa, Australia, and the United States, among other places, as well as commentary.

*Secrets from the Center of the World* (1989), a poetry collection by Joy Harjo, photographs by Stephen Strom. This book of prose poems by Harjo, the Native American poet, and photographs of the American West emphasize the traditional Native American belief in the interconnectedness of all things.

beyond mere innovations in style. In her article "Darwinism, Doxology, and Energy Physics: the New Sciences, the Poetry and the Poetics of Gerard Manley Hopkins" (2007), she writes, "He engages with Darwin's multi-form, individuated, and diverse world but characteristically draws back in his desire for order, design, and unity, positing a power beyond the purely mechanical. He is attracted to and recoils from the universe created by thermodynamics, with its seemingly contradictory laws." While not all scholars agree on the most appropriate lens through which to view his work, the diversity of contemporary scholarship on Hopkins's poetry speaks to his contribution to English literature.

## Responses to Literature

1. Read "Pied Beauty" and "God's Grandeur." Compare and contrast how Hopkins views nature, God, and human nature in these poems.
2. Gerard Manley Hopkins put his calling as a priest ahead of his talent and love for poetry. Do you think that the two are compatible? Can someone devote their life to two callings?
3. Hopkins coined the phrase "sprung rhythm" to describe his poetic style. In sprung rhythm a single line may have many stressed syllables right in a row rather than having them spaced out with unstressed

syllables. Write a poem about something you believe in strongly, loading the lines with stressed syllables. Use the poem “The Wreck of the Deutschland” as a guide.

4. Read Hopkins’s “terrible sonnets.” In a class discussion, explain how the images and themes of these last sonnets are different from his earlier works. Use specific lines to support your argument.

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## Nick Hornby

BORN: 1957, Redhill, Surrey, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, screenplays

MAJOR WORKS:

*Fever Pitch* (1992)

*High Fidelity* (1995)

*About a Boy* (1998)

*A Long Way Down* (2005)

### Overview

Nick Hornby is an award-winning English novelist best known for his works *High Fidelity*, *About a Boy*, and *Fever Pitch*, all of which have been made into films.



Nick Hornby Cambridge Jones / Getty Images

Hornby’s novels offer honesty about emotion and an awareness of the deficiencies of modern men, an awareness that is charming rather than defensive or apologetic.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

#### *Student of Literature and Popular Culture*

Nick Hornby was born on April 17, 1957, the child of middle-class parents who lived outside of London. His father, Sir Derek Hornby, is an international businessman. When his parents divorced, he lived with his mother and younger sister, Gill, who is also a writer. He spent Sunday afternoons with his father, who, in his need to find ways to entertain his son, took him to a football (soccer) match, thus beginning the younger Hornby’s lifelong obsession with the Arsenal Football Club.

After graduating from Cambridge University with a degree in English literature, he worked as a high school English teacher and taught English as a second language to foreigners. He later began writing reviews and articles about popular culture for such magazines as *Time Out*, *Vogue*, *GQ*, and the *New Yorker*.

**From Football to Fiction and Film** Hornby's first book, his 1992 memoir *Fever Pitch*, is an account of his years as a fanatic supporter of the Arsenal Football Club. Hornby followed this by editing another book about football, *My Favourite Year: A Collection of New Football Writing* (1993), and in 1996 he co-edited a book of sports writing.

Hornby turned to novel writing with *High Fidelity* (1995), a book that shows the author's passion for music. His third novel, *About a Boy* (1998), concerns a man who likes to date women but has commitment issues. Both novels sold well and were made into feature films. He also wrote the screenplay for the 1997 film adaptation of *Fever Pitch*. Hornby has continued to write popular novels, including a novel for young adults—*Slam*—as well as nonfiction and screenplays.

### Works in Literary Context

Hornby is a writer noted for his sense of humor and earthiness, primarily writing about male obsessions and crises. He writes about his subjects in a way with which some critics strongly identify.

**Football and Modern Men** When *Fever Pitch* was first published in 1992, critics asserted that the novel is more about obsession than about football. When *Fever Pitch* was a nominee for a Whitbread Prize, it received remarkable critical praise, including the admiration of many people indifferent or even hostile to British football. Andrew Anthony called Hornby "the most successful British author of his generation." Hornby followed that success by editing another book about football, placing himself in a niche as the intellectual's football fan.

Like *Fever Pitch*, *High Fidelity* is about a sort of addiction, in this case to rock-and-roll music and the making of lists. In this novel, Hornby extends his range beyond football to the concerns and shortcomings of modern men in general.

In *About a Boy*, Hornby focuses on the shortcomings of his protagonist, a somewhat affectless man who becomes involved in the lives of two people who have serious problems. One critic wrote that "*About a Boy* is another guy's book: female characters are drawn with sympathy, but halfheartedly." Hornby has admitted to some hesitation in writing about women: "I think that I still have a certain degree of caution about it, I think that I've been very hard on the men in my books and I think it would be quite hard for a male writer to be—in this current climate—as hard on a certain kind of woman."

### Works in Critical Context

Hornby's books are genuinely well liked, in some cases with readers who are not customarily bookish, in part because of Hornby's familiarity with contemporary popular culture—rock music, television, and movies as well as football. Other critics attribute his success to his ability to represent contemporary masculinity, especially its short-

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hornby's famous contemporaries include:

**Jay McInerney** (1955–): American writer who is considered a member of the American "literary brat pack" that came to prominence in the 1980s.

**Nicholson Baker** (1957–): American novelist whose unconventional novels use stream-of-consciousness narrative to focus on the minutiae of everyday life.

**Cameron Crowe** (1957–): American writer and film director best known for his works depicting popular culture, such as *Almost Famous*.

**Rick Bragg** (1959–): American journalist and memoir writer who won the Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing in 1996.

comings, with honesty and emotion. David Gritten writes: "He is beloved by some people who rarely read books at all, but to whom he appeals on a direct, emotional level." Andrew Anthony agrees that he has achieved "that most delicate and difficult of acts: a literary writer with mass appeal."

Reviewers, however, have sometimes accused Hornby of being too ingratiating to readers. Others have noted that his plots are slight and conventional, and that he breaks no new literary ground. He is often considered to be merely a popular writer who makes no real intellectual demands on his readers. While critics may disagree about his literary value as a writer, his status as the most successful British author of his generation seems secure.

**High Fidelity** Tony Parsons of the *Daily Telegraph* (London) noted that in *High Fidelity*, Hornby "writes like Martin Amis with a heart or Roddy Doyle with an unfeasibly large record collection." Molly Gould of the *San Francisco Review of Books* praised the novel for its solid representation of how music affects human life and added that "although [*High Fidelity*] is a trip through territory that in real life is mundane, depressing, and trite, the novel is anything but." Hornby was also commended by Mark Jolly of the *New York Times Book Review* for capturing "the loneliness and childishness of adult life with such precision." Jolly also said that one of the many good things about the novel was that it "fills you with the same sensation you get from hearing a debut record album that has more charm and verve than anything you can recall." Joan Wilkinson of *Booklist* called the novel "a rare, touching glimpse of the masculine view of affairs of the heart."

**A Long Way Down** Hornby's 2005 novel, *A Long Way Down*, has also been well received by critics, and

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Hornby's works explore the concerns and shortcomings of modern men. Here are some other works that touch on similar themes:

- A Fan's Notes* (1968), a novel by Frederick Exley. This novel is an introspective fictional memoir that examines celebrity, masculinity, self-absorption, and addiction.
- Something Happened* (1974), a novel by Joseph Heller. This novel consists of the internal monologue of a man facing the futility of his career, the stagnation of his marriage, the impossibility of being a good parent, and the loss of opportunities and time.
- Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996), a novel by Helen Fielding. This novel chronicles the attempts of a thirty-something woman to make sense of single life in the 1990s.

Hornby has been praised for knowing "how to write dialogue that comments on human experience without drowning in a vat of sap," in the words of Yvonne Zipp of the *Christian Science Monitor*. Gail Caldwell of the *Boston Globe* agreed, adding that while "Hornby has long since proven his hilarity," it was his "depth and generosity of his grasp of the tragic" that endears him to his readers. Ken Babstock of Toronto's *Globe And Mail* commended the characters in the story, saying that he "does social misfits exceedingly well. He does misfits interacting with other misfits near perfectly." D. J. Taylor of the *Independent* (London) regarded *A Long Way Down* as "one of those transitional novels in which the interest lies in the spectacle of the novelist trying to break new ground."

### Responses to Literature

1. Hornby has been noted for his insightful portrayals of modern men. Based on his portrayal of men, what kinds of insights does he offer into modern women? Discuss whether these insights are as revealing and poignant as his depictions of men.
2. Hornby wrote for magazines for many years before turning to novels. What aspects of his magazine-writing show up in his novel-writing? In what ways might his magazine experience have helped or hindered his fiction writing?
3. Critics have accused Hornby's works of being too easy to read to have much intellectual or literary value. Write an essay either supporting or opposing this criticism of Hornby's writing. Consider other authors you have read whose works might be subject to a similar criticism.
4. In *Fever Pitch*, Hornby writes honestly and revealingly about one of his passions. Choose an activity that you are passionate about and write an essay modeled on *Fever Pitch*.

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## A. E. Housman

BORN: 1859, Worcestershire, England

DIED: 1936, Cambridge, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

*A Shropshire Lad* (1896)

*Last Poems* (1922)

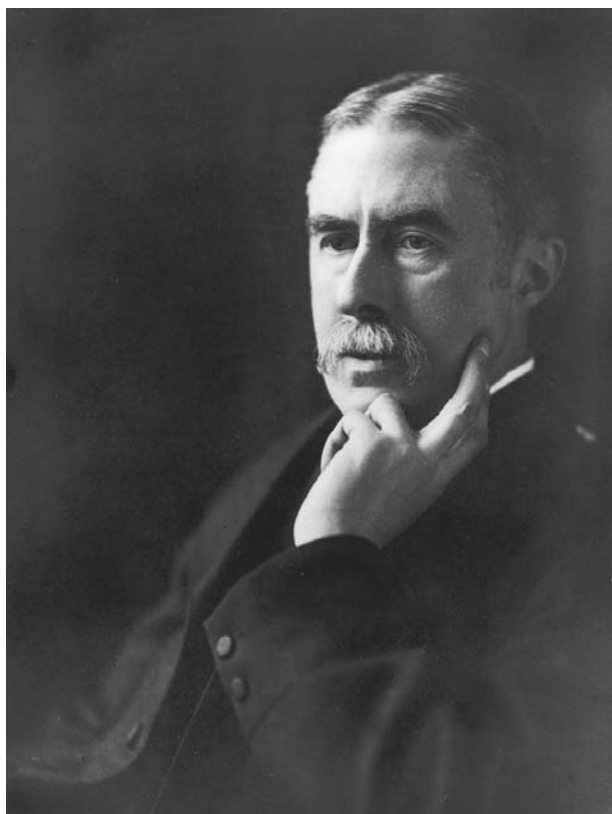
*More Poems* (1936)

*The Collected Poems of A. E. Housman* (1939)

*Manuscript Poems: Eight Hundred Lines of Hitherto Uncollected Verse from the Author's Notebooks* (1955)

### Overview

A. E. Housman continues to be a frequently read poet despite the fact that, since the initial publication of his verse, his work has been intermittently praised and rebuffed for what has been called its "obvious limitations." Although Housman's creative output consisted of three slim volumes, his first collection, *A Shropshire Lad* (1896), has become one of the most celebrated and best-selling books of verse in the English language and has secured his standing in literary history as a great but thematically restrained poet. Housman's open investigations of the mysteries of death and the dual nature of humankind have earned him acknowledgment as a precursor to the development of modern poetry. Critic Stephen Spender attempts to identify the elements that make his poetry satisfying: "At his best, Housman is a poet of great force and passion whose music is quite unforced, combining sensuousness with a cold discipline." Whatever Housman's limitations, his poems, by virtue of their emotional force and classical beauty, continue to attract attention and praise.



A. E. Housman E. O. Hoppe / Mansell / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***A Pastoral Childhood and Early Tragedy*** Alfred Edward Housman was born in Fockbury in the county of Worcestershire, England, within sight of the Shropshire hills, a place that he would later allegorize in his poems. He was the eldest of seven children in a family that would produce a famous dramatist, Housman's younger brother, Laurence, and a novelist and short-story writer, his sister Clemence. He attended Bromsgrove School, a notable institution that emphasized Greek and Latin studies, where he worked diligently and developed a talent for precise translation that would later earn him a reputation as a formidable classical scholar. Despite his academic success, Housman's childhood was not a happy one. In addition to being a small and frail boy who did not easily form friendships, Housman also had to confront the death of his mother when he was twelve years old. This tragedy affected him profoundly and set into motion the slow erosion of his religious faith. Years later, Housman wrote that he "became a deist at thirteen and an atheist at twenty-one." This religious disillusionment was reflected in his poetry in the form of stoic despair and a fatalistic view of life.

Housman grew up in a time known as the Victorian era, during which Queen Victoria ruled England and its territories. Queen Victoria sat on the throne longer than

any other British monarch, from 1837 until 1901. This period saw significant changes for both Britain and Europe as a whole, with industrialization leading much of the population to jobs in factories instead of on farms as in the past. The era also saw an extended period of peace and prosperity, leading many free to pursue intellectual interests and occupy themselves with the complex rules of behavior found in "proper" society.

***University and A Shropshire Lad*** Housman entered Oxford University in 1877. He continued to immerse himself in his favorite subjects, Latin and Greek, and also helped to found *Ye Round Table*, an undergraduate magazine featuring humorous verse and satire. Housman's contributions to this publication demonstrate not only his wit but his talent for nonsense verse, which he kept well-concealed in later years even as his critics were condemning his poetry for being stark and humorless. While at first excelling in his work at Oxford, Housman later inexplicably failed his examinations in 1881 and did not earn his degree until 1892, when he was made professor of Latin at University College in London. The cause for Housman's failure was for many years a subject of speculation among critics and biographers. Today, it is known from Housman's diaries that the reason for his failure at Oxford was at least partially caused by his hopelessness over his relationship with a young science student named Moses Jackson. The realization of his own homosexuality and the eventual rejection by Jackson embittered Housman. He became a repressed and melancholy recluse who later declined all honors he was offered, including the poet laureateship of England and the Order of Merit, one of the most prestigious distinctions bestowed by the British government. Housman scholars contend that other than the death of his mother, this rebuff by Jackson was the most determinative event of Housman's life.

It was shortly after the crisis at Oxford that Housman wrote all of *A Shropshire Lad*. His declaration that "I have seldom written poetry unless I was rather out of health" seems to substantiate the opinion that emotional trauma greatly influenced his work. Such poems as "Shake Hands We Shall Never Be Friends, All's Over" and "Because I Liked You Better" make direct reference to his relationship with Jackson, although Housman did not allow them to be published during his lifetime. While Housman wrote an ironic poem on the occasion of Oscar Wilde's imprisonment for homosexual acts, stating in part that "they're taking him to prison for the colour of his hair," he nonetheless was an extremely proper and reserved Victorian gentleman and dreaded being associated with homosexuality.

In *A Shropshire Lad*, Housman adopted the persona of a young Shropshire yeoman, whom he called Terence Hearsay, in order to distance himself from the autobiographical aspects of his work. This technique has caused some commentators to charge that Housman never developed his themes of unrequited love, the oblivion



## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Housman's famous contemporaries include:

**Walt Whitman** (1819–1892): American poet who wrote with great passion and possessed a love of nature.

**Queen Victoria** (1819–1901): The ruler of England for most of the Industrial Revolution, from 1837 until her death.

**Lewis Carroll** (1832–1898): Author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and fellow Oxford scholar.

**Oscar Wilde** (1854–1900): Flamboyant British playwright and novelist known for his wit.

of death, and idealized military life beyond the emotional and intellectual capabilities of his main character. Two well-known poems contained in this volume, “To an Athlete Dying Young” and “When I Was One-and-Twenty,” concentrate solely on the loss of youthful dreams. The thematic limitations of *A Shropshire Lad* and the lack of emotional development led Cyril Conolly to state that “many of Housman’s poems are of a triteness of technique equaled only by the banality of thought.” However, other critics praise the economy of Housman’s verse and his expertise with the pastoral tradition. Most of the poems included in *A Shropshire Lad* are short, sometimes not more than one stanza in length, and written in the four-line ballad style with rhyming alternate lines. According to many critics, this stylistic symmetry demands great discipline and sophistication and in this sense Housman’s poems rival the classics in their mastery of conciseness and subtlety. Concentrating on the stylistic elements of his verse, H. P. Collins justifies Housman’s thematic limitations by declaring that “the greatest poetry does not need complex emotions.”

**Last Poems and More Poems** Housman’s *Last Poems* (1922) appeared twenty-six years after the first publication of *A Shropshire Lad*, leading some critics to speculate on the nature of Housman’s poetic talent. While this volume was also praised for its fine craftsmanship, it was noted by many reviewers that the themes presented were mere continuances of those expounded upon in his previous volume. This did not prevent *Last Poems*, which included “Epithalamium,” a piece commemorating the wedding of Moses Jackson, and “Hell Gate,” which chronicles a successful rebellion against the forces of death, from becoming quite popular. *More Poems* (1936), published posthumously by Housman’s brother, Laurence, was also a popular success, but since most of the poems included had been omitted from the previous volumes by Housman himself, it is generally considered an inferior body of work.

Housman’s famous lecture at Cambridge University in 1933 represents the only statement that Housman ever made about his personal theories of poetry. Housman cited William Shakespeare’s songs, Heinrich Heine’s poetry, and the Scottish border ballads as his major poetic influences. Metrically, his poems stand midway between the lyric and the quatrain form of the ballad, while thematically the influence of Shakespeare is apparent in Housman’s dismissal of the theological and emphasis on everything mortal. Dramatic irony and surprise endings are important elements in the work of Heine, and Housman uses them in much the same fashion as the German poet. While critics contend that Housman’s comments offer important insights into the motivations behind his own verse, they also speculate that Housman intended to be deliberately vague and misleading to provoke controversy. However, Housman prefaced his lecture with the statement that although he would be attempting to delve into the characteristics of poetry, he was not by nature a critic and preferred instead the discipline of writing verse.

### Works in Literary Context

In all of his poetry, Housman continually returns to certain favorite themes.

**Time and Death** The predominant theme in Housman’s work, according to Cleanth Brooks, is that of time and the inevitability of death. As Brooks states, “Time is, with Housman, always the enemy.” Housman frequently deals with the plight of the young soldier, and he is usually able to maintain sympathy both for the youth who is the victim of war and for the patriotic cause of the nation. Robert B. Pearsall suggested in a 1967 essay that Housman dealt frequently with soldiers because “the uniform tended to cure isolation and unpopularity, and soldiers characteristically bask in mutual affection.”

It is not only war but nature, too, that brings on thoughts of death in Housman’s poetry. In the famous lyric beginning “Loveliest of trees, the cherry now,” the speaker says that since life is all too short, he will go out “To see the cherry hung with snow,” a suggestion of death. In a well-known verse from *Last Poems*, a particularly wet and old spring causes the speaker to move from a description of nature—“The chestnut casts his flambeaux, and the flowers stream from the hawthorn on the wind away”—to a sense that his lost spring brings one closer to the grave. To his credit, Housman often does not merely wallow in such pessimistic feelings but counsels a kind of stoical endurance as the proper response: “Shoulder the sky, my lad, and drink your ale.”

**The Hostile Universe** Another frequent theme in Housman’s poetry, one that is related to the death motif, is the attitude that the universe is cruel and hostile, created by a God who has abandoned it. In the poem “Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries” in *Last Poems*, mercenaries must take up the slack for an uncaring deity: “What God abandoned, these defended, / And saved the

sum of things for pay.” R. Kowalczyk, in a 1967 essay, summed up this prevalent theme: “Housman’s poetic characters fail to find divine love in the universe. They confront the enormity of space and realize that they are victims of Nature’s blind forces. A number of Housman’s lyrics scrutinize with cool, detached irony the impersonal universe, the vicious world in which man was placed to endure his fated existence.”

Furthermore, society sometimes intrudes into Housman’s world of nature, and when it does, his rustic youth frequently comes in conflict. As Oliver Robinson noted, “Housman is especially sympathetic with the man who is at odds with society, the man who cannot keep ‘these foreign laws of God and man.’”

### Works in Critical Context

The themes of his poetry and his emotional handling of them mark Housman as an extension of the Romantic movement that flourished in England in the early part of the nineteenth century and had a resurgence in the aesthetic movement of the 1890s. The critical evaluation of Housman’s work in the two decades after his death in 1936 is tinged with the anti-Romanticism of the period.

***A Shropshire Lad*** As Maude M. Hawkins noted, *A Shropshire Lad* “sold so slowly that Laurence Housman at the end of two years bought up the last few copies.” Though the volume was better appreciated in the United States than in England, Hawkins called most of the critical reviews “lukewarm or adverse.” *A Shropshire Lad* did not sell well until it was published by Grant Richards, a man with whom Housman became lifelong friends. Richards’s first edition was five hundred copies in 1897, which sold out; he then printed one thousand copies in 1900 followed by two thousand in 1902. Hawkins summed up the volume’s early public reception: “After the slow stream of Housman readers from 1896 to 1903, the momentum of popularity increased rapidly.”

During the twentieth century *A Shropshire Lad* has been more of a popular than a critical success. In accounting for this popularity, the writer George Orwell spoke of certain elements in the poetry: a snobbism about belonging to the country; the adolescent themes of murder, suicide, unhappy love, and early death; and a “bitter, defiant paganism, a conviction that life is short and the gods are against you, which exactly fitted the prevailing mood of the young.”

### Responses to Literature

1. The speaker in “When I Was Young and Twenty” learns a lot in one year. List some more modern works that deal with similar coming-of-age themes and explain what the main character or speaker learns and at what cost. Does the similarity in theme constitute a similarity in the coming-of-age character? Does this universal theme that repeats itself throughout the generations continue to have the same face or does this theme present itself differently in modern times?

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Housman’s poetry examines the surprisingly short distance between youth and death. Being an atheist, he believed that life was fleeting and death final. Here are a few other works that explore similar ideas about the finality and inevitability of death.

- The Seventh Seal* (1957), a film directed by Ingmar Bergman. A medieval knight must play a tense game of chess with Death to determine the outcome of his life.
- “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” (1951), a poem by Dylan Thomas. The speaker in this poem fiercely urges an unknown subject to “rage, rage against the dying of the light.”
- “Ozymandias” (1818), a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley’s famous poem treats the subject of mankind’s pride and the eradicating forces of nature and time.
- Death Be Not Proud* (1949), a memoir by John Gunther. This book is about the author’s son, who died of a brain tumor at the age of seventeen.

2. Read “To an Athlete Dying Young” and determine whether Housman owes more to Greek mythology or to William Shakespeare. What elements in either Greek mythology or Shakespeare support your answer?
3. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about the typical characteristics of Victorianism and Romanticism in literature. In which camp do you think Housman’s poetry belongs? Why?

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## ■ Ted Hughes

BORN: 1930, Mytholmroyd, England

DIED: 1998, North Tawton, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Hawk in the Rain* (1957)

*Earth Owl* (1963)

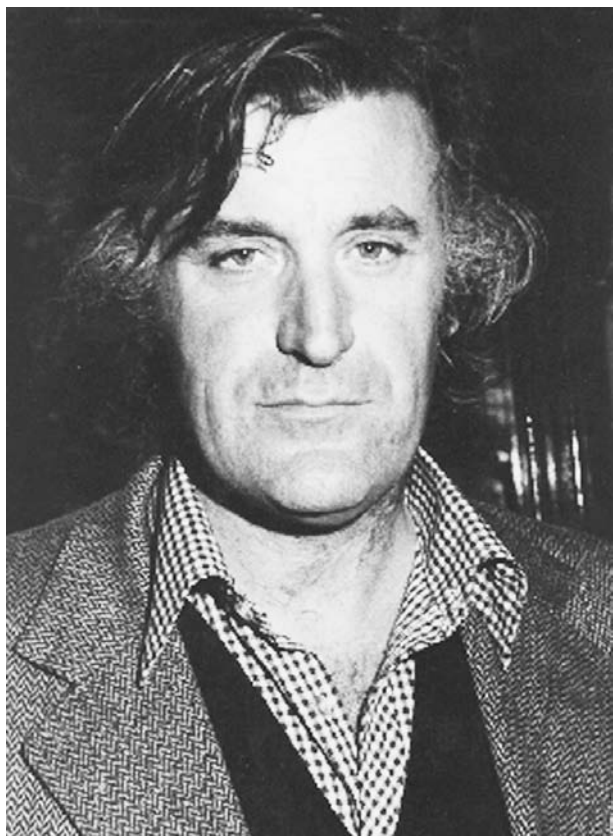
*The Iron Man: A Story in Five Nights* (1968)

*Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow*  
(1970)

*Birthday Letters* (1998)

### Overview

Ted Hughes used a rich, vibrant language to explore themes that were mythic, earthy, and elemental. Throughout his long poetic career, Hughes was interested in confronting the rougher instincts that govern people's relationships with one another and with nature. When he began writing poetry in the 1950s, Hughes's verse signaled a dramatic departure from the more polite



Ted Hughes Hughes, Ted, photograph by Mark Gerson. Reproduced by permission.

and understated styles of the period. He is also widely remembered, not always positively, as the husband of the brilliant but troubled poet Sylvia Plath, who committed suicide in 1963.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Poetry and Plath** Ted Hughes was born as Edward James Hughes on August 17, 1930, in Mytholmroyd, a small town in Yorkshire, England. His father was a carpenter who had seen service in World War I. Throughout his life (and even in his death, where his ashes were scattered on a remote hillside miles from any road), Hughes remained connected to the atmosphere of the English countryside. He did not write about rolling in the daffodils as his predecessor William Wordsworth did; Hughes employed a darker vision of the literal and symbolic ruggedness of the landscape.

After attending school in South Yorkshire, where he began writing poetry, he was awarded a scholarship to Cambridge in 1948 that he took after a brief stint in the Royal Air Force. He studied English literature for two years, then switched to archaeology and anthropology, two subjects that were of immense importance to his work.

While at Cambridge, he published little, but spent his time working as, among other things, a rose gardener, a schoolteacher, and a zoo attendant. All three of these jobs are reflected in his poetry in later years. It was at a literary party in Cambridge in 1956 that he met a fellow student, the American poet Sylvia Plath. Within four months they were married. Plath encouraged Hughes to work harder at getting his poems published, and his first book, *The Hawk in the Rain*, was published to acclaim in both the United States and Britain in 1957.

**Suicides** After a short period teaching in Massachusetts, Hughes and Plath returned to settle in England. They had two children and moved to a thatched cottage in a small Devonshire village. When Hughes fell in love with another woman, his marriage to Plath collapsed. Plath moved back to London, where, in a depressed state, she committed suicide in February 1963. Hughes was deeply affected by her death and wrote little poetry for the next three years. He instead devoted much time and studious care to the editing of Plath's poems and journals. After many decades of refusing to speak about her to the public, he surprised everyone shortly before his own death by publishing *Birthday Letters* (1998), a series of candid and intimate poems about Plath and their stormy relationship.

From the early 1960s on, Hughes published a great deal of prose, which contains valuable hints for understanding his later poetry. Hughes's prose demonstrates his continuing interest in myth, folklore, the occult, and

the spirituality of primitive man. These ideas eventually fused with his established interests in animals and nature, which resulted in what is widely considered Hughes's major work, *Crow* (1970). Hughes in fact created, in the course of writing these poems, an elaborate folktale about the dark side of nature. Hughes has said in an interview: "The first idea of *Crow* was really an idea of style. . . . to write his songs, the songs that a Crow would sing. In other words, songs with no music whatsoever, in a super-simple and a super-ugly language which would in a way shed everything except just what he wanted to say." The pessimistic view of life found in *Crow* can perhaps be explained by personal tragedies that happened in Hughes's life a year and a half before *Crow* was published. His companion, Assia Wevill, killed herself in March 1969 in the same manner as Plath and also took the life of the young daughter she had with Hughes.

**A New Direction** Hughes married his second wife, Carol Orchard, in 1970. Hughes began expanding his work to drama, children's literature, literary criticism (especially of William Shakespeare), translations of Greek classics, and illustrated books. He settled in the countryside of Devon and became involved in farming, especially sheep and cattle raising, which he writes of in *Moortown* (1979). These poems, written in a wide variety of styles, describe the everyday experience of life in the countryside. Rather than stressing the unbridgeable gaps between mankind and animals, as in his earlier poems, Hughes writes of livestock here with a farmer's easy familiarity. The farm presents a continuing cycle of birth and death in which the human beings participate, as in bringing calves and lambs into the world or putting diseased animals out of their misery. The book is dedicated to the memory of Jack Orchard, Hughes's father-in-law. Hughes remembers him at work about the farm, shearing sheep, building a fence in a December downpour, and doing everything as a man who is instinctively at home with his work and moving in harmony with nature.

In 1984 Hughes was appointed poet laureate, the honor of being the "national poet" of Britain, given to just one person at a time until their death. The laureateship is usually given to poets whose writings are uncontroversial in style and theme, but Hughes shattered that stereotype for all future poets of his country. He died at his home in North Tawton, England, on October 28, 1998.

### Works in Literary Context

Hughes's poetry takes part in the modernist movement, dating from the 1900s up to the 1950s and beyond, which was a reaction to the strict realism and conventional morality of literature in the Victorian 1800s. Modernist art is more abstract, impressionistic, and symbolic than Victorian art. It is also less confident than Victorian art, expressing themes of self-exploration, pessimism

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hughes's famous contemporaries include:

**The Beatles** (1960–1970): John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr became the most popular and progressive rock band of their time, inspiring an outburst of artistic creativity and confidence throughout Europe and America during the 1960s.

**Samuel Beckett** (1906–1989): Irish playwright and poet who found a dark humor and sense of futility in people's attempts to find meaning and lasting happiness in an uncaring universe.

**Carl Jung** (1875–1961): Swiss analytical psychologist who theorized that "archetypes"—familiar myths, symbols, and images—are part of the "collective unconscious" of mankind.

**Philip Larkin** (1922–1985): A witty, satirical, and nostalgic poet who many assumed would become the English poet laureate when Hughes was appointed to the position in 1984.

**Robert Lowell** (1917–1977), American poet who, like Hughes, wrote technically sophisticated and heavily symbolic verse.

about the present and future, and doubt about what a single individual can do to stem the tide of violence and cultural decay—all themes made urgent throughout the period of the two world wars. T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf shared with Hughes an exploration of individual consciousness sometimes expressed in fragmented, difficult language.

**Animals** Hughes's works, however, perhaps have the most in common with the poetry of D. H. Lawrence. Lawrence is more widely known for his novels, but his poetry often deals with the alien world of animals in a flexible language that seeks to capture something of each animal's style and nature. Where Lawrence's work deals with one animal at a time, often focusing on themes of sexuality and violence, Hughes often places his animals in a much wider context of nature as a whole and frames them with mythology and symbolism. Hughes often wrote about mankind most effectively by excluding it entirely: By writing about animals and showing us what mankind is not, he offers insight into what mankind is and has the potential to be. Animals participate in the cycles of natural energy from which man has grown distant. For example, in *Crow*, the black bird symbolizes the lowest common denominator of life, the stubborn will to live that outlasts even the worst disasters.



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Hughes often examined animals and the natural world in contrast with human action and society. Here are other works that focus on nature as a means of understanding humans:

"Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" (1798), a poem by William Wordsworth. This classic poem of the Romantic period captures Wordsworth's philosophy on the power of nature.

*Walden* (1854), a collection of essays and recollections by Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau famously spent more than two years, mostly in solitude, in a cabin near Walden Pond in Massachusetts. His book contains many close descriptions of the animals and natural features of Walden.

*Birds, Beasts, and Flowers* (1923), a collection of poetry by D. H. Lawrence. These poems describe the sometimes shocking and amusing nature of animals and plants, showing what we can learn from the unselfconscious way they are in tune with the cycles of birth, life, and death.

*The Call of the Wild* (1903), a novel by Jack London. This short novel is told from the perspective of a domestic pet dog, Buck, who returns to a primitive world to become the leader of a pack of wolves.

**Landscape** Hughes is also one of the most important contemporary poets of the natural landscape. There is a long tradition of "pastoral" poetry that dates back to the ancient Greeks. These decorative and exaggerated poems (almost always written by courtly city dwellers who spent little time in the actual countryside) celebrated the simple, romantic lives of idealized shepherds and shepherdesses who spent their days pining for one another and gazing at the peaceful hillsides. With the Romantic movement (1790s–1830s), poets such as William Wordsworth and John Keats found a new (although sometimes sentimentalized) realism in nature, making claims of its restorative power for mankind's gentler nature. Modernist poets generally avoided nature poetry—Hughes is one of the few exceptions—as they tended to focus instead on the psychology of the individual. The untamable wildness that Hughes finds in animals and nature has been a dominant influence on many contemporary poets, such as Michael Longley and Thom Gunn. As interdisciplinary scholars shape the new field of animal studies, Hughes's distinctive voice is likely to find an even wider audience.

**Plath's Influence** The one poet who had the greatest impact on Hughes was the same poet on whom he had the greatest impact—Sylvia Plath. Plath and Hughes encouraged one another to strive for more complex and personal expression and to explore with great honesty themes of longing, memory, and identity. After Plath's death,

Hughes edited and promoted her writing (as well as destroying some of it to protect their children, as he claimed), and his last major work was a collection of poems he wrote about their life together titled *Birthday Letters*.

## Works in Critical Context

Ted Hughes enjoyed a rapid rise to fame, thanks in part to a prestigious poetry contest he won at the age of twenty-seven. His first book, *The Hawk in the Rain*, was picked up by a major publisher in England and the United States in 1957 and received very favorable reviews. Critics were impressed by the surprisingly confident and mature poetic voice of the young poet.

There were some misfires in Hughes's career. One was his collaboration with theater director Peter Brook, *Orghast*, which was written and performed in Iran. Hughes created an entirely new language with the intention of communicating emotionally, beneath the level of logical comprehension. Another critical failure was his narrative poem *Gaudete* (1977), a grim and poorly constructed tale of a priest who is replaced with an evil double who seduces his parishioners into a sexual cult.

Hughes has also received criticism from Sylvia Plath's devoted readers, some of whom would boo at Hughes's readings, blaming him for her depression and suicide. Judged on its own merits, however, Hughes's poetry for adults has consistently received favorable reviews, and even those critics who find it unnecessarily violent or pessimistic still appreciate its vigor and technical virtuosity.

Hughes received many honors for his children's writing, including the Kurt Maschler Award, the Guardian Award for Children's Fiction, and, on three occasions, the Signal Poetry Award. In assessing Hughes's contributions as a children's writer, critic and editor Keith Cushman noted the continuity between his work for younger and older readers, especially in his later years, when poetry for children was an integral part of Hughes's overall artistic achievement. Cushman writes, "The effort to reach the child's imagination with poetry, to nurture it, to preserve it and keep it whole, must be recognized as being of paramount importance to the literary faith of Ted Hughes."

## Responses to Literature

1. How did Sylvia Plath influence Ted Hughes's life and work? How did he influence hers?
2. Read Hughes's *Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow*. Do you find the crow to be symbolic, or do think the poems are more meaningful if the crow is just a crow?
3. Is poetry about nature more or less relevant in our time, with the rise of cities and the spread of suburbs? What new perspectives can nature poetry take, and how has Hughes's work contributed to that?
4. How do archeology and anthropology influence Hughes's work?



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## Victor Hugo

BORN: 1802, Besançon, France

DIED: 1885, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama

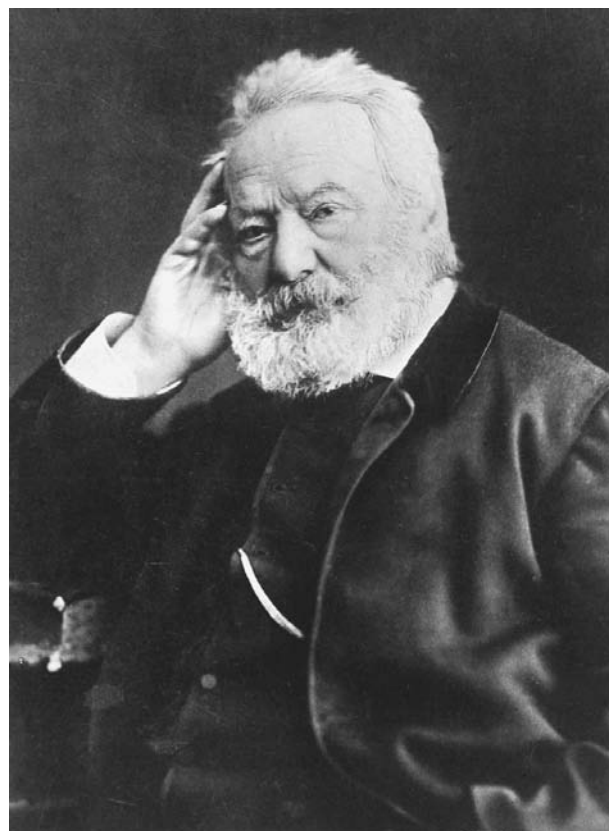
MAJOR WORKS:

*The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831)

*Les Misérables* (1862)

### Overview

Victor Hugo is considered one of the leaders of the Romantic movement in French literature. Although chiefly known outside France for the novels *Les misérables* (1862) and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831), he is famous in France for his revolutionary and controversial style as a poet.



Victor Hugo Mansell / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

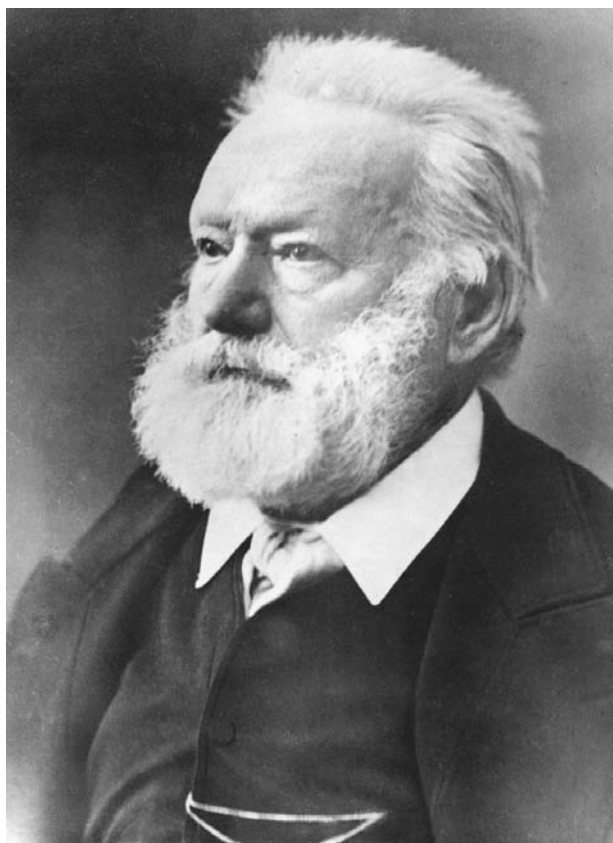
### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Family and Early Years** Victor-Marie Hugo was born in Besançon, France, on February 26, 1802, less than fifteen years after the French Revolution. The French Revolution had been a revolt of the working class against the rule and power of the nobility and the clergy. Royalists, who supported the nobility and former king who had been overthrown, were stripped of much of their power and wealth, and control of the country was eventually taken by the military leader Napoléon Bonaparte.

Victor-Marie Hugo was the third son of Sophie Trébuchet, daughter of royalist sympathizers, and Joseph Hugo, member of the military under Napoléon. Hugo traveled extensively during his childhood until, when he was twelve years old, his parents separated, and he moved to Paris with his mother.

When Napoléon was forced into exile in 1814, Madame Hugo rejoiced; her lover had been executed because he had plotted to overthrow the military leader. Her reaction might account for Victor's early hatred of Napoléon, his preoccupation with the death penalty, and the fascination with exile that appeared so often in his works.

**First Works and the Beginnings of Romanticism** Hugo gained literary recognition at a young age from



Victor Hugo Hugo, Victor, after 1860, photo by Pierre Petit. Giraudon / Art Resource, NY.

Louis XVIII, who ruled France after Napoléon's exile, as well as from French writer François-René de Chateaubriand and other literary figures. He published his first volume of poetry, *Odes et poésies diverses* in 1822, which earned him a pension from Louis XVIII and enabled him to marry his childhood sweetheart, Adèle Foucher. They would have five children together.

Hugo's home became a center of intellectual activity, and he counted among his friends the writer and critic Charles Sainte-Beuve and writer Théophile Gautier. During this period, Hugo wrote several novels and volumes of poetry that foreshadow his Romantic tendencies.

His 1826 poetry collection *Odes et ballades* was received with great enthusiasm. Though the royalist and Catholic press, disappointed with not seeing church and throne exalted, condemned the poems, they were loudly praised by the youthful Romantic school for their extravagance.

Hugo's dramatic work began with the publication of the controversial preface to his lengthy and unstageable verse drama *Cromwell* (1827). This preface sought to establish a new set of dramatic principles that were to become the manifesto of the Romantic movement. Hugo

demanded a new form of verse drama that abandoned the formal rules of classical tragedy. One of his most important principles concerns the necessity of portraying the grotesque as well as the beautiful. Since both are found in nature, and since all that is in nature should be in art, both should be presented in a play.

These precepts were put to the test in 1830, with the production of Hugo's *Hernani* (1830). Its debut was referred to as the "battle of *Hernani*" because of the heated reaction of the theatergoers. Groups of Romantic writers and artists attended performances to demonstrate support for Hugo's revolutionary use of language and innovative dramatic techniques; traditionalists tended to denounce Hugo's disregard of the classic precepts of drama, including unity of time, place, and action.

***The Hunchback of Notre Dame and Further Success*** Hoping to benefit from this publicity, Hugo's publisher pressed him for a novel. Hugo returned to a novel he had begun researching in the late 1820s about Parisian life during the Middle Ages and completed the book in January 1831. It was published as *Notre-Dame de Paris* (the English title became *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*) that March.

The novel, set in Paris in 1482, recounts three men's love and one woman's hatred for a young Gypsy dancer, who in turn loves a fourth man. Completed in the months immediately following the July Revolution of 1830, in which King Louis X was overthrown by his cousin, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* also illustrates Hugo's views on numerous social and political issues, particularly the development of the common people as a significant political force.

During the production of *Hernani*, Hugo's friend Sainte-Beuve had begun a lengthy affair with Hugo's wife, and Hugo in turn began a series of affairs. His most lasting relationship began in 1833 with the actress Juliette Drouet; although he was unfaithful to her, their relationship continued until death.

From 1834 until 1862, Hugo concentrated on the theater, poetry, and politics. Hugo was very successful in the theater during the 1830s, focusing on historical drama. While certain themes—fate, virginity, death, and class conflict—recur in his plays, Hugo's dramas differ from his novels through their emphasis on political power.

Hugo's literary achievement was recognized in 1841 by his election to the Académie française and in 1845 by his elevation to the peerage. During the latter half of that decade, he devoted most of his time to politics, delivering a number of political speeches condemning the legal system and society's persecution of the poor.

In 1849, he was elected to the National Assembly. Because of his opposition to Louis Napoléon's dictatorial ambitions, he was forced to leave France following

Napoléon's coup d'état of 1851. He initially fled to Belgium but finally settled on the British island of Guernsey.

**Les Contemplations** While exiled, Hugo published *Les Contemplations* (1856), poems centered around the 1843 death of his daughter Léopoldine. The volume contrasted lighthearted, lyrical works in one section called *Autrefois* (Before) and more pessimistic, philosophical works in the other part, *Aujourd'hui* (Today). Both question the poet's relation with others and God. This collection is often considered his poetic masterpiece.

**Les misérables** After publishing several other volumes of poetry, Hugo published *Les misérables* (1862), which was an amazing financial success. It is the story of a released convict, Jean Valjean, who faces repeated hardships despite his efforts to reform. Valjean's tragic history is a condemnation of unfair legal penalties, and his life in the underworld of Paris illustrates Hugo's conviction that social evils are created and fostered by existing laws and customs. *Les misérables* was influential in the movement for legal and social reform in nineteenth-century France.

Upon his return to France in 1870, Hugo received widespread public recognition. Though nominated for public office, he took little further interest in national affairs. His death from pneumonia on May 22, 1885, warranted national mourning. He was buried in the Panthéon in Paris, an honor reserved for only the most significant figures in French history and art.

### Works in Literary Context

Some say that Victor Hugo had no "followers." More specifically, French poet Charles Baudelaire once announced that what influence Hugo had was harmful, sapping the originality of those who came too close. Certainly Hugo never created a new aesthetic, such as the one begun by Baudelaire and continued by Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Valéry. He may have simply lived too long: by the time he died, those who would have taken up where he left off were already dead or had been left behind.

**A Stylistic Revolution in Poetry** Hugo's 1826 poetry collection *Odes et ballades* marked a stylistic revolution. The ballad form freed Hugo from the constrictions of classical lyric and allowed him to articulate the poetics announced in *Odes et poésies diverses*, one based not on form but on idea. In this regard, he may be considered the precursor of both Surrealism and Symbolism, movements that opposed Realism and Naturalism in their attempt to portray the particular and the true, not through description and specifics but through symbolic imagery.

**The Dark Power in Hugo's Dramatic Poetry** Although critical attention to Hugo's work diminished shortly after his death, he has always been distinguished as an outstanding poet whose technical virtuosity advanced French poetry. In fact, in 1855, a critic for the *North American*

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hugo's famous contemporaries include:

**Alexandre Dumas** (1802–1870): French writer best known for his historical novels, including *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

**Franz Liszt** (1811–1886): Hungarian Romantic composer and pianist, famous for his prodigious output and virtuosic technique.

**Charles Baudelaire** (1821–1867): French poet and critic. Baudelaire was famous for *Les fleurs du mal* (1857), a volume of poetry that was controversial because of its themes of sex and death.

**Flora Tristan** (1803–1844): French feminist, activist, and writer. Tristan argued that women's rights would also benefit men and the working class.

**Giuseppe Verdi** (1813–1901): Italian Romantic composer specializing in opera. His *Rigoletto* (1851) is based on a play by Hugo.

*Review* suggested that Hugo's dramatic poetry "inaugurated a new era in French literature" because of his intensity and break with convention. Hugo sought to express "the real" in drama and embraced characters and themes that were grotesque or sublime, an unusual practice that disgusted much of the literary public. He saw beauty in what was traditionally considered dark and disturbed. This interest in exposing truths normally hidden spilled through his other writings, from his political commentary about the Revolution of 1848 to his well-known prose.

### Works in Critical Context

It has often been claimed that Hugo's works are fantastic and that they fail to achieve the psychological or descriptive truth characteristic of the novel. Richard B. Grant, writing about Hugo's early books, argues that *roman* should be translated as "romance," not "novel." While the novel tries to represent "real people" through the analysis, description, and evolution of character, the romance deals in archetypes and tends toward myth. Hugo sought to represent a general, archetypal reality, more similar to myth than to modern novels.

**Desire and Disgust in Hugo's Prose** Hugo's deviation from French dramatic and literary tradition challenged critics and readers alike. His predilection for violent, gritty language, often considered a form of "bestiality," as noted by a reviewer for the *Edinburgh Review* in 1865, confronted conventional literary standards and morality. But this same style also intrigued and excited readers, and a few years before *Les misérables* was even

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The Romantic movement in the 1820s examined exceptional individuals and their struggles. Here are some works by other major European Romantic writers.

*The Betrothed* (1827), a novel by Alessandro Manzoni.

Two young lovers, Lucia and Renzo, struggle to be together in seventeenth-century Italy during the Thirty Years' War.

*The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844), a novel by Alexandre Dumas. Frenchman Edmund Dantes is betrayed by a friend and imprisoned. Upon his escape from jail, he vows to dedicate his life to revenge.

*Don Álvaro* (1835), a play by Ángel de Saavedra. Spanish lovers Don Álvaro and Leonor de Vargas are caught by her father as they are about to elope, and her father is accidentally killed. Don Álvaro flees and becomes a soldier, and then a monk, until Leonor's vengeful brother discovers him.

*Eugene Onegin* (1831), a novel in verse by Aleksandr Pushkin. Eugene Onegin is a bored Russian nobleman who rejects a young woman, only to fall in love with her and be rejected in turn several years later when she has become more cosmopolitan.

*The Red and the Black* (1831), a novel by Stendhal. Julien, ambitious but born into the working class, uses hypocrisy to rise in French society, but he is undone by an impulsive act of violence.

published, public gossip proclaimed that Hugo's new novel would "sap the foundations of Imperialism, and shake society to its very centre." Hugo's work was the proverbial forbidden fruit, and everyone wanted a taste. The novel's title alone alluded to the deviance within; the entire book was about *les misérables*, or the wretches, the wretched. In the preface to the novel, Hugo writes that *Les misérables* reflects the way contemporary "laws and customs" create a "social damnation" that leads to "artificial hells in the middle of civilization."

***The Hunchback of Notre Dame*** Contemporary French reviewers were generally unimpressed by this novel when it was published. Max Bach has attributed this to the partisan concerns of various groups of critics, including those who objected to the absence of religion in the novel and those who believed that Hugo had slighted the middle class. Critics agree that it is not the plot, but the evocation of the Middle Ages that constitutes the center of the novel's interest, and the statement that the cathedral is its main character is of great validity.

***Les Contemplations*** A lyric meditation on mortality, love, and the fate of humankind, this collection was charac-

terized by Suzanne Nash as an allegory of evolving spiritual awareness, each book disclosing a new level of metaphysical insight, progressing from nature, love, and social awareness to suffering, duty, and prophetic clairvoyance. Other scholars—John Frey, for example—dispute this assessment, arguing that since there is no clear resolution to the problems posed by the poems in the collection, if *Les Contemplations* is an allegory, then it is of failure, not of progress. All agree *Les Contemplations* combines passion and faith in an intensely personal drama of loss and salvation.

## Responses to Literature

1. In his outline of Romanticism, Hugo stated that the "grotesque" must be treated alongside the beautiful. Look up *grotesque* in a dictionary. Using the definition, write a paragraph exploring what you think he meant by that statement.
2. With your classmates, discuss characterization: When you read a book or watch a movie, are you interested in realistic characters who seem true to life, or do you prefer archetypes—that is, characters who symbolize a particular type of person, such as the Hero, the Misunderstood Genius, and so forth? How do you view the characters in Hugo's *Les misérables*?
3. Hugo's novel *Les misérables* was adapted to the musical *Les Misérables* in the 1980s. It has been hugely successful, being translated into twenty-one languages and playing almost continuously since then. Using resources at your library or on the Internet, research the musical. Create a poster or electronic presentation that describes the popularity of this adaptation. Why do you think it has struck such a chord with the public?
4. Some musicians and celebrities, like U2's Bono, Wyclef Jean, and Angelina Jolie, are publicly involved in social issues. Does their opinion on issues influence you? Does it depend on who the celebrity is? Write a short essay outlining your views, giving specific reasons for your opinions.
5. Victor Hugo was strongly opposed to the death penalty. The U.S. Supreme Court made a landmark decision about the death penalty in the case *Baze v. Rees* in April 2008. Using sources from your library or the Internet, research their decision and write a report that presents the case. At the end of the report, include a paragraph in which you offer your personal opinions about the Court's decision.

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## Aldous Huxley

BORN: 1894, Godalming, Surrey, England  
 DIED: 1963, Los Angeles, California, United States  
 NATIONALITY: English  
 GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction  
 MAJOR WORKS: *Crome Yellow* (1921)  
*Point Counter Point* (1928)  
*Brave New World* (1932)  
*Brave New World Revisited* (1958)



Aldous Huxley Huxley, Aldous, photograph. AP Images.

### Overview

British author Aldous Huxley published more than thirty nonfiction pieces that ranged from travelogues to social criticism to examinations of literature. He wrote plays, short stories, poetry, and screenplays. Despite Huxley's facility and prolific output in these various genres, he is best known for novels such as *Crome Yellow*, *Point Counter Point*, and *Brave New World*.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Aldous Leonard Huxley was born on July 26, 1894, in Godalming, England, into a family of intellectuals. Huxley and his siblings were strongly encouraged to carry on the family tradition of intellectual pursuit. His brother Julian became a practical biologist who gained considerable fame for popularizing science. Aldous himself was pursuing a career in science when he was beset with an eye affliction that left him blind for over a year. The condition made the long hours of reading and research that the scientific field required impossible. He never completely recovered, and the course of his life's work was forever changed.

**Literary Friendships** Huxley attended Balliol College at Oxford University, where he completed his studies



## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Huxley's famous contemporaries include:

**F. Scott Fitzgerald** (1896–1940): An American novelist best known for his critique of high society in the 1920s, as expressed in *The Great Gatsby*.

**Frida Kahlo** (1907–1954): A Mexican painter widely recognized for her vibrant style. She was influenced by Realism, Symbolism, and Surrealism.

**William Faulkner** (1897–1962): An American novelist associated with the Southern Gothic tradition of literature.

**William Butler Yeats** (1865–1939): An Irish poet honored with the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923.

**Franklin Delano Roosevelt** (1882–1945): The thirty-second president of the United States, who served four terms in office.

with high honors in English. While at Oxford, Huxley was introduced to Philip Morrell, a member of the British Parliament, and his wife, Lady Ottoline. Because of his family's reputation, Huxley was soon accepted into the Morrells's circle of friends. He began spending time at Garsington, the Morrells' country estate, where he met such influential literary figures as Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot, H.G. Wells, and D.H. Lawrence—with whom he would later forge a great friendship.

Huxley's eye problems disqualified him for military service in World War I, a brutal conflict in which many of Huxley's contemporaries died. In fact, Huxley's generation was decimated by the war: nearly 900,000 British soldiers lost their lives between 1914 and 1918, and nearly twice that many were wounded. After World War I Huxley engaged in literary journalism and was on the staff of the *Athenaeum*, edited by John Middleton Murry. For the greater part of 1923–1930 he lived in Italy; after 1926 he spent much time there with D.H. and Frieda Lawrence. Lawrence was a strong influence on Huxley, particularly in his mistrust of intellect and trust in physical instincts.

**Social Critiques** Huxley's early period was characterized by skeptical, brilliant portraits of the decadence of post-World War I upper-class British society, particularly its younger members. Many young people in the 1920s felt moved to “live it up”—partly as a way of forgetting the war, partly because the war taught them that life is short. The decade was marked in the United States and Europe by frivolity and sensual excess. The nonstop partying was labeled liberating by some writers and artists, but others saw it as empty and shallow. Huxley, like fellow English writer Evelyn Waugh, used his consider-

able satiric wit to skewer the rich, vapid revelers of the 1920s. This was the period of the novels *Crome Yellow* (1921), *Antic Hay* (1923), and *Point Counter Point* (1928). Huxley's growing disgust with the modern world was not limited to the younger generation. His disdain for the twentieth-century obsession with science, technological development, and commercial and industrial advancement would become explicit in *Brave New World* (1932), his best-known work.

**The Search for Meaning** After *Brave New World*, Huxley's fiction and nonfiction both became increasingly concerned with his interest in religious mysticism. Huxley left England and settled in Southern California, where he became interested in the work of Gerald Heard, who had become interested in the Hindu tradition of Vedanta, a seeking of self-realization. Although *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936) and *Time Must Have a Stop* (1944) are both concerned with religious quests, *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* (1939), which satirizes the popular culture of Southern California, displays some of the comic irony for which Huxley became famous in the 1920s.

Much of Huxley's later energy was devoted primarily to nonfiction, both in essays presenting social criticism, and in works like *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945), which collects and comments on the texts that Huxley considered the vital essence of the world's mystical writings. Indeed, Huxley's career and personal life turned more and more toward mysticism as he aged, which is one of the points of contention his critics had with him.

During the last ten years of his life, Huxley engaged in experiments with the hallucinogenic drugs mescaline and LSD, under the supervision of a physician friend. In *The Doors of Perception* (1954), he wrote about his experience with these drugs. The books later became popular with members of the countercultural movement in the United States in the 1960s. In fact, the influential rock band the Doors took its name from Huxley's book and the band's enigmatic singer and songwriter, Jim Morrison, quoted Huxley often.

Huxley's health, which was never robust, took several turns for the worse in the early 1960s. As he continued to work on a variety of projects, his strength continued to slip away. He died in his Los Angeles home on November 22, 1963, the same day fellow British writer C.S. Lewis died and President John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

### Works in Literary Context

Huxley was connected to many of the leading literary figures of his time. These artists influenced his work and thinking, especially D.H. Lawrence, who was a great friend and mentor. Nonetheless, Huxley was able to carve a niche for himself in speculative fiction in the form of science fiction, drawing on the traditions of H.G. Wells and Jules Verne and influencing later science fiction

novelists like George Orwell and even more recently David Mitchell.

**Satirical Science Fiction** *Brave New World* is certainly Huxley's most famous novel. It has been in print ever since its publication, is taught widely, and remains a point of reference for political scientists, editorialists, newscasters, and freelance pundits. The book has many passages of intellectual interest; however, its enduring success is probably best explained by Huxley's mastery of the form. Economical in structure and sure-handed in its treatment of scene and character, the novel is moralistic without being essayistic. Perhaps only George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) rivals *Brave New World* in rendering as a story for millions of readers the enduring perplexities of technology, social development, and political enfranchisement.

**Influence** Huxley was connected to many of the leading literary figures of his time. These artists influenced his work and thinking, especially D.H. Lawrence, who was a great friend and mentor. In *Brave New World*, Huxley produced an enduring novel in the science fiction genre, and one of the most brilliant satires in English literature. Although other intellectuals before Huxley—H.G. Wells, E.M. Forster, Yevgeny Zamyatin, and Karel Capek—had experimented with science fiction romances as a method of social criticism, Huxley's novel remains a seminal work and a remarkable achievement, which influenced many later writers from George Orwell to Robert Silverberg.

### Works in Critical Context

Although Huxley wanted to be remembered as a social novelist and essayist, he was aware that his extraordinary emotional detachment limited his ability to create sympathetic characters. In addition to noting his limitations as a fiction writer, many critics who admired his satire deplored his rejection of rationalism and his long devotion to the cause of mysticism. Yet Huxley's later work testifies to the seriousness of his religious quest. However, Huxley will probably owe his enduring reputation not to the writing describing his spiritual search but to his efforts as a satirist, and ultimately, perhaps, to the brilliant, imaginative satire in *Brave New World*.

***Brave New World*** The numerous concepts suggested by *Brave New World* have made the novel a study centerpiece for social scientists, teachers, and technology mavens, and a favorite among readers for several generations.

While critic Edward Cushing found Huxley's narrative technique of average strength, he did admire the author's intent and the novel's moral. Cushing wrote in the *Saturday Review of Literature* that "Mr. Huxley is eloquent in his declaration of an artist's faith in man, and it is his eloquence, bitter in attack, noble in defense, that, when one has closed his book, one remembers." *New York Times Book Review* contributor John Chamberlain found Huxley's novel a humorous attack on progressive global thought. In his

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Huxley was deeply interested in exploring unconventional paths to understanding life and the world. His works show his interest in mysticism and drug-induced altered states of consciousness. Other works that explore unconventional views of reality include:

*The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (1968), an anthropological work by Carlos Castaneda. Castaneda's hugely popular, but controversial, book deals with his research into the practices of a Mexican shaman named Juan Matus.

*The Razor's Edge* (1944), a novel by Somerset Maugham. Disillusioned after his experiences in World War I, the protagonist of this novel seeks transcendence in India.

*The Dharma Bums* (1958), a novel by Jack Kerouac. Beat novelist Kerouac blends Buddhism and an American faith in the power of landscape in this novel about hitchhiking and roaming through the West.

review he contended that *Brave New World* satirizes "the imminent spiritual trustification of mankind, and has made rowdy and impertinent sport of the World State whose motto shall be Community, Identity, Stability."

***Brave New World Revisited*** In 1958, twenty-six years after the appearance of *Brave New World*, Huxley published *Brave New World Revisited*, a book that examines Western life in the prosperous era following World War II. Contending that the society depicted in *Brave New World* will eventually come to be, Huxley calls for the human race to take note of, and reverse, its course. *Brave New World Revisited* received a substantial amount of attention upon its publication, partly due to the book's relation to Huxley's most famous novel. Many critics, however, felt that the book was an important work in its own right, one that related significant detail on modern society. "*Brave New World Revisited* is of the utmost importance for the knowledge of growing psychic pressures in a world in transition," appraised *New York Times Book Review* contributor Joost A.M. Meerloos. While viewing the book as a departure from Huxley's fiction, *Saturday Review* critic Granville Hicks commented that "if we have lost something in the way of entertainment, what we have gained is more important." Commenting on the author's talent for presenting invigorating arguments, Christopher Sykes wrote in the *Spectator* that "Mr. Huxley's writing remains as compelling and as brilliant as ever."

Huxley also used *Brave New World Revisited* to clarify the intentions of his 1932 novel. Whereas critics such as the *New York Times Book Review*'s Chamberlain saw *Brave New*

*World* as a satirical take on complacency and conformity, the book's author clearly felt otherwise. As Huxley states in *Brave New World Revisited*: "Any culture which, in the interests of efficiency or in the name of some political or religious dogma, seeks to standardize the human individual, commits an outrage against man's biological nature."

## Responses to Literature

1. Using the Internet and the library, research some of the controversies involved in the debate over whether cloning should be legal. In a short essay, reflect on these issues as they relate to *Brave New World*. Consider, for example, whether you think cloning is a step toward the dystopia described in the novel.
2. Read Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* and compare it in tone, content, and message to *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*. Both Gibran and Huxley have been described as mystics or as being highly concerned with mysticism. Based on these readings, try to analyze what it means to be a "mystic"—is it a philosophy, a way of reasoning, or a state of mind?
3. Read *Doors of Perception*. Given what is now known about the harmful effects of the drugs Huxley took in order to write this text, how do you think this text would be received if it were written today?
4. Read both *Brave New World* and Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal." In some way, each of these texts is a work of satire. In a short essay, compare the tones of these texts.

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## ■ Henrik Ibsen

BORN: 1828, Skien, Norway

DIED: 1906, Oslo, Norway

NATIONALITY: Norwegian

GENRE: Drama, Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

*Brand* (1866)

*Peer Gynt* (1867)

*A Doll's House* (1879)

*Ghosts* (1881)

*The Wild Duck* (1884)

*Hedda Gabler* (1890)



Henrik Ibsen Ibsen, Henrik, photograph. AP Images.

## Overview

In the English-speaking world today, Henrik Ibsen has become one of three playwrights widely recognized as preeminent. Alongside William Shakespeare and Anton Chekhov, he stands at the very center of the standard dramatic repertoire, and no actor can aspire to the highest rank unless he has played some of the leading roles in the works of these three giants. In this triad, Ibsen occupies a central position, marking the transition from a traditional to a modern theater. While Ibsen, like all great dramatists who came after him, owed an immense debt to Shakespeare, Chekhov (who regarded Ibsen as his “favorite writer”) was already writing under Ibsen’s influence. Ibsen can thus be seen as one of the principal creators and wellsprings of the modern movement in drama, having contributed to the development of all its diverse manifestations: the ideological and political theater, as well as the introspective trends that focus on the representation of inner realities and dreams.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

### *Poverty in Norway and the Beginnings of Poetry*

Ibsen was born on March 20, 1828, to wealthy parents in Skien, Norway, a lumber town south of Christiania (now Oslo). The family was reduced to poverty when Ibsen’s father’s business failed in 1834. After leaving school at the age of fifteen and working for six years as a pharmacist’s assistant, Ibsen went to Christiania hoping to continue his studies at Christiania University. He failed the Greek and mathematics portions of the entrance examinations, however, and was not admitted. During this time, he read and wrote poetry, which he would later say came more easily to him than prose. He wrote his first drama, *Catiline*, in 1850 and although this work generated little interest and was not produced until several years later, it evidenced Ibsen’s emerging concerns with the conflict between guilt and desire. While *Catiline* is a traditional romance written in verse, Ibsen’s merging of two female prototypes—one conservative and domestic, the other adventurous and dangerous—foreshadowed the psychological intricacies of his later plays.

### *From an Original Drama per Year to Life on Scholarships*

Shortly after writing *Catiline*, Ibsen became assistant stage manager at the Norwegian Theater in Bergen. His duties included composing and producing an original drama each year. Ibsen was expected to write about Norway’s glorious past, but because Norway had just recently acquired its independence from Denmark after five hundred years, medieval folklore and Viking sagas were his only sources of inspiration. Although these early plays were coldly received and are often considered insignificant, they further indicated the direction Ibsen’s drama was to take, especially in their presentation of strong individuals who come in conflict

with the oppressive social mores of nineteenth-century Norwegian society. In 1862, verging on a nervous breakdown from overwork, Ibsen began to petition the government for a grant to travel and write. He was given a stipend in 1864, and various scholarships and pensions subsequently followed. For the next twenty-seven years he lived in Italy and Germany, returning to Norway only twice. While critics often cite Ibsen’s bitter memories of his father’s financial failure and his own lack of success as a theater manager as the causes for his long absence, it is also noted that Ibsen believed that only by distancing himself from his homeland could he obtain the perspective necessary to write truly Norwegian drama. Ibsen explained: “I could never lead a consistent life [in Norway]. I was one man in my work and another outside—and for that reason my work failed in consistency too.”

### *Phase One: Verse and the Stage, a Transition from Poetry*

Critics generally divide Ibsen’s work into three phases. The first consists of his early dramas written in verse and modeled after romantic historical tragedy and Norse sagas. These plays are noted primarily for their idiosyncratic Norwegian characters and for their emerging elements of satire and social criticism. In *Love’s Comedy*, for example, Ibsen attacked conventional concepts of love and explored the conflict between the artist’s mission and his responsibility to others. *Brand* (1866), an epic verse drama, was the first play Ibsen wrote after leaving Norway and was the first of his works to earn both popular and critical attention. The story of a clergyman who makes impossible demands on his congregation, his family, and himself, *Brand* reveals the fanaticism and inhumanity of uncompromising idealism. While commentators suggest that *Brand* is a harsh and emotionally inaccessible character, they also recognized that this play reflects Ibsen’s doubts and personal anguish over his poverty and lack of success. More significant still was Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt*, written while Ibsen was traveling in Italy and published in Denmark in 1867. Written in verse, *Peer Gynt* was not originally intended for stage performance, but has gone on to become a significant piece in Ibsen’s oeuvre, in good part because of the score written for it by composer Edvard Grieg.

### *Phase Two: Social Realism and the Prose Drama*

Ibsen wrote prose dramas concerned with social realism during the second phase of his career. During his stay in Munich, when he was becoming increasingly attuned to social injustice, Ibsen wrote *The Pillars of Society* (1877). A harsh indictment of the moral corruption and crime resulting from the quest for money and power, this drama provided what Ibsen called a “contrast between ability and desire, between will and possibility.” Writing as the Industrial Revolution was making new labor relations possible throughout much of Western Europe, and writing from a Germany newly united as one nation (in 1871)—under the firm, if less than universally beloved hand of Kaiser Wilhelm I of Prussia—Ibsen was in an excellent position to bear witness to both the power

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ibsen's famous contemporaries include:

**Anton Chekhov** (1860–1904): Along with Ibsen and August Strindberg, Chekhov is considered one of the three most important early-modern playwrights; his works deliberately challenged traditional dramatic structure.

**Elizabeth Cary Agassiz** (1822–1907): An American educator, Agassiz cofounded Radcliffe College and served as its first president. The college was founded in order to give women access to the high educational standards offered by neighboring Harvard, which at the time was open only to men.

**Thomas Edison** (1847–1931): Perhaps the best-known inventor of all time, Edison pioneered several devices that are today considered indispensable to modern life as well as a new, industrial approach to scientific research.

**Leopold II** (1835–1909): King of the Belgians, Leopold became infamous in his own time for his ruthless exploitation of the Congo region of Africa, which he claimed as his own personal domain. His colonialism was too much to stomach for many of his fellow Europeans, and a campaign eventually forced him to relinquish his personal control of the region.

**Charles Darwin** (1809–1882): The English naturalist famous for his theory of evolution and natural selection. His *Origin of Species* caused a sensation upon its publication and stirred a fierce public debate that reverberates to this day.

and the limitations of the human will. His protagonist here, Consul Bernick, while first urging his son to abide by conventional morality and become a “pillar of society,” eventually experiences an inner transformation and asserts instead: “You shall be yourself, Olaf, and then the rest will have to take care of itself.”

Ibsen's next drama, *A Doll's House* (1879), is often considered a masterpiece of realist theater. The account of the collapse of a middle-class marriage, this work, in addition to sparking debate about women's rights and divorce, is also regarded as innovative and daring because of its emphasis on psychological tension rather than external action. This technique required that emotion be conveyed through small, controlled gestures, shifts in inflection, and pauses, and therefore instituted a new style of acting.

*Ghosts* (1881) and *An Enemy of Society* (1882) are the last plays included in Ibsen's realist period. In *Ghosts* Ibsen uses a character infected with syphilis to symbolize how stale habits and prejudices can be passed down from generation to generation. Written as much of Europe—though not Norway—was engaged in what has come to be called the European “scramble for Africa,” the effort to

control colonies in areas newly desirable as sources of raw material and markets for consumer goods, *An Enemy of Society* demonstrates Ibsen's contempt for what he considered stagnant political rhetoric. Audiences accustomed to the Romantic sentimentality of the “well-made play” were initially taken aback by such controversial subjects. However, when dramatists George Bernard Shaw and George Brandes, among others, defended Ibsen's works, the theater-going public began to accept drama as social commentary and not merely as entertainment.

**Phase Three: Negotiating the Symbolic** With *The Wild Duck* (1884) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890), Ibsen entered a period of transition during which he continued to deal with modern, realistic themes, but made increasing use of symbolism and metaphor. *The Wild Duck*, regarded as one of Ibsen's greatest tragicomic works, explores the role of illusion and self-deception in everyday life. In this play, Gregers Werle, vehemently believing that everyone must be painstakingly honest, inadvertently causes great harm by meddling in other people's affairs. At the end of *The Wild Duck*, Ibsen's implication that humankind is unable to bear absolute truth is reflected in the words of the character named Relling: “If you rob the average man of his illusion, you are almost certain to rob him of his happiness.” *Hedda Gabler* concerns a frustrated aristocratic woman and the vengeance she inflicts on herself and those around her. Taking place entirely in Hedda's sitting room shortly after her marriage, this play has been praised for its subtle investigation into the psyche of a woman who is unable to love others or confront her sexuality.

Ibsen himself returned to Norway in 1891 and there entered his third and final period with the dramas *The Master Builder* (1892), *Little Eyolf* (1894), *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896), and *When We Dead Awaken* (1899). In these final works, Ibsen dealt with the conflict between art and life and shifted his focus from the individual in society to the individual alone and isolated. It is speculated that *The Master Builder* was written in response to Norwegian writer Knut Hamson's proclamation that Ibsen should relinquish his influence in the Norwegian theater to the younger generation. Described as a “poetic confession,” *The Master Builder* centers around an elderly writer, Solness, who believes he has misused and compromised his art. *Little Eyolf*, the account of a crippled boy who compensates for his handicap through a variety of other accomplishments, explores how self-deception can lead to an empty, meaningless life. The search for personal contentment and self-knowledge is also a primary theme in *John Gabriel Borkman*, a play about a banker whose quest for greatness isolates him from those who love him. And in his final play, *When We Dead Awaken*, subtitled “A Dramatic Monologue,” Ibsen appears once more to pass judgment on himself as an artist. Deliberating over such questions as whether his writing would have been more truthful if he had lived a more active life, *When We Dead Awaken* is considered one of Ibsen's most personal and autobiographical works.



After completing *When We Dead Awaken*, Ibsen suffered a series of strokes that left him an invalid for five years until his death in 1906.

### Works in Literary Context

Ibsen's first and most obvious impact was social and political. His efforts to make drama and the theater a means to bring into the open the main social and political issues of the age shocked and scandalized a society that regarded the theater as a place of shallow amusement. And Ibsen, too, seems to have been the only playwright to, in his lifetime, become the center of what almost amounted to a political party—the Ibsenites, who in Germany, England, and elsewhere appear in the contemporary literature as a faction of weirdly dressed social and political reformers, advocates of socialism, women's rights, and a new sexual morality (as in the Ibsen Club, in Shaw's *The Philanderer*). The fact that Ibsen was equated with what amounted to a counterculture has had a considerable influence on the subsequent fluctuations of his fame and the appreciation of his plays by both the critics and the public.

***The Birth of Modern Theater*** It is usually assumed that the shock caused by Ibsen, and the furiously hostile reaction his early plays provoked, were due to this political and social subversiveness. But that is only part of the truth. Another important cause of the violent reaction by audiences and critics alike lay in the revolutionary nature of Ibsen's dramatic method and technique. This is an aspect which is far more difficult for us to comprehend today as we have become completely conditioned to what were then "revolutionary" conventions. Much of the fury directed at the time against Ibsen had nothing to do with his supposed obscenity, blasphemous views, or social destructiveness. What was criticized above all was his obscurity and incomprehensibility. Ibsen, it was said again and again, was a troublemaker who was obscure on purpose in order to mask the shallowness of his thinking, and whose dark hints and mysterious allusions were never cleared up in his plays.

***Against Repression: A Precursor to Freud*** Sexuality, and especially female sensuality, which did not officially exist at all for the Victorians, was seen by Ibsen as one of the "dangerous instincts" in the sense that when it is suppressed by societal demands it forces the individual to live an inauthentic life, creating feelings of inadequacy and conflict. Mrs. Alving's failure to break out of her marriage in *Ghosts* foreshadows Hedda Gabler's inability to give herself to Lovborg, and is shown by Ibsen to bring about similarly tragic results. In *Little Eyolf* the conflict is between motherhood and uninhibited female sensuality. Rita Allmers is the most openly sexually voracious character in Ibsen's plays: here the rejection of motherhood derives from an obsession with the sensual aspect of sex. Rita's exaggerated sexual drive may well spring from her husband's equally disproportionate com-

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Ibsen's plays derive much of their intensity from the relationships between the male and female characters, and the conflict of love versus honor that those relationships embody. Here are some other plays that have explored similar themes:

*Hamlet* (c. 1601), a tragedy by William Shakespeare.

Arguably Shakespeare's greatest play, this tragedy—based on a twelfth-century account of Danish history, the *Gesta Danorum* ("Deeds of the Danes")—revolves around a son honor-bound to avenge his father's death at the hands of his uncle, and the doubt and soul-searching this obligation inspires.

*Trifles* (1916), a play by Susan Glaspell. Written forty years after *A Doll's House*, this play examines similar themes of male-female relationships, but played out against a background of grinding poverty. The social and emotional differences between the sexes form the crux of the action, painting both men and women in rather broad strokes.

*Miss Julie* (1888), a play by August Strindberg. A Swedish contemporary of Ibsen and often compared with him, Strindberg in this play touches on class issues in addition to the contrast between love and lust and conflicts between men and women.

*The Seagull* (1895), a play by Anton Chekhov. Deeply influenced by Ibsen, this celebrated Russian playwright in this his first play adds a diverse cast to the standard Ibsenesque themes of love versus honor, strongly evoking *Hamlet* in the process.

mitment to his work as a philosopher, which has led him to neglect both her sexual needs and their child's emotional and educational demands. In his attention to these issues, Ibsen presaged the work of famous Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, who developed a human science around the idea and the treatment of repressed sexuality.

### Works in Critical Context

Although audiences considered Ibsen's dramas highly controversial during his lifetime because of his frank treatment of social problems, today's scholars focus on the philosophical and psychological elements of his plays and the ideological debates they have generated. Ibsen's occasional use of theatrical conventions and outmoded subject matter has caused some critics to dismiss his work as obsolete and irrelevant to contemporary society, but others recognize his profound influence on the development of modern drama. Haskell M. Block has asserted: "In its seemingly limitless capacity to respond to the changing need and desires of successive generations of

audiences, [Ibsen's] work is truly classic, universal in implication and yet capable of endless transformation."

**Peer Gynt** The protagonist of Ibsen's drama *Peer Gynt* (1867), while witty, imaginative, and vigorous, is incapable of self-analysis. Although this play takes on universal significance due to Ibsen's use of fantasy, parable, and symbolism, it is often described as a sociological analysis of the Norwegian people. Harold Beyer explains: "[*Peer Gynt*] is a central work in Norwegian literature, comprising elements from the nationalistic and romantic atmosphere of the preceding period and yet satirizing these elements in a spirit of realism akin to the period that was coming. It has been said that if a Norwegian were to leave his country and could take only one book to express his national culture, [*Peer Gynt*] is the one he would choose."

**A Doll's House** For those who have seen performances of *A Doll's House* by Claire Bloom or Jane Fonda on stage, screen, or television in the last decade, there is little difficulty in understanding Ibsen's reputation as a writer of social-problem plays. Most people still see the play as one about a heroic young woman's victorious struggle for freedom from repressive social conventions. Some, however, like critic Hermann Weigand (writing as early as the 1920s), see Nora as a deceptive, selfish, intriguing young woman bent only on having her own way. These critics believe Ibsen is satirizing and debunking her rather than, as others believe, holding her up as virtue incarnate.

Most of the characters in the play are conceived of as playing roles drawn from the kinds of Danish and French romantic melodramas from which Ibsen learned his craft. As famed Marxist literary critic Raymond Williams points out, there is "the innocent child-like woman, involved in a desperate deception, the heavy insensitive husband; the faithful friend." "Similarly," Williams continues, "the main situations of the play are typical of the intrigue drama: the guilty secret, sealed lips, the complication of situations around Krogstad's letter... Krogstad at the children's party... the villain against a background of tranquility..." For Williams all of this is an indication of the play's weaknesses: "None of this is at all new," he says, "and it is the major part of the play."

## Responses to Literature

1. The concept of integrity was a recurring theme in Ibsen's plays. Select two of his plays in which integrity plays a central role and analyze them. Are characters with integrity rewarded or punished? What vision does Ibsen present of the value, or lack thereof, of integrity in a modern world?
2. In Ibsen's works, how does the dialogue between closely related characters differ from the dialogue between strangers? What purpose does this difference serve?
3. Ibsen was forced to write a second ending to *A Doll's House*, in which Nora decides to remain in her marriage for the sake of her children. Research which ending best reflects the cultural reality of the nineteenth-century Europe in which the play was written? Explain your choice.
4. Discuss the use of Christian allegory in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*.
5. Ibsen was just one of millions of Norwegians who emigrated during the nineteenth century. Research the motivations behind this mass exodus. How do Ibsen's reasons for leaving match up with the average Norwegian's?

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## Eugene Ionesco

BORN: 1909, Slatina, Romania

DIED: 1994, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: Romanian, French

GENRE: Fiction, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*The Bald Soprano* (1950)

*The Chairs* (1952)

*Rhinoceros* (1960)

## Overview

Eugene Ionesco was one of the founders of a style of drama called the Theater of the Absurd. He revolutionized drama with his radical new perspective on language, demonstrating its subversion, ordinariness, and humorous explosiveness, as well as its domineering power. His works feature nightmarish scenes with sometimes tragic, sometimes ludicrous characters whose surrealistic and grotesque attempts to deal with the absurdity of life fail.



Eugene Ionesco Ionesco, Eugene, photograph. The Library of Congress.

His plays have been translated into most European languages, as well as Chinese, Japanese, and Hebrew, and have been performed all over the world.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Growing Up Amidst Familial Instability** Eugene Ionesco was born Eugen Ionescu in Slatina, Romania, on November 13, 1909. He was the second of Eugen and Marie-Therese Ionescu's three children. His father, a lawyer, moved his family to France in 1910 to complete his law degree in Paris, but he returned to Romania in 1916 to fight in World War I. Initially, when the war first broke out in 1914, Romania had declared neutrality. However, in 1916, under pressure from France and other Allied countries, Romania declared war on Austria-Hungary. The elder Ionescu left his wife in Paris to care for their children, eventually divorcing her. When Ionesco was thirteen, his mother, unable to provide for her children, returned to Romania and transferred them to their father's custody.

**Provoking Controversy** From 1929 to 1933, Ionesco attended the University of Bucharest, where he completed

a degree in French language and literature. During these years, he became famous for his public literary debates with his professor of aesthetics, Mihail Dragomirescu. Ionesco's first publication was a volume of poetry, *Elegii pentru fiinte mici* (Elegies for Minuscule Creatures), published in Romania in 1931. Ionesco's first volume of essays, *Nu* (No; translated into French as *Non*, 1986), was published in 1934 and sparked debate in Romanian literary circles. Ionesco attacked revered Romanian writers of the time—most prominent among them the novelist Camil Petrescu and the poets Tudor Arghezi and Ion Barbu.

**Marriage, Emigration, and Diplomacy** After graduating from the University of Bucharest, Ionesco worked as a high school teacher in the Romanian provinces and in Bucharest. In 1936, he married Rodica Burileanu, a philosophy student. In 1938, Ionesco moved to Paris to work on his dissertation, which he never finished. He and his wife returned to Romania in 1940, but he clung to the hope of leaving the country. In 1941, Romania entered World War II as part of the Axis powers, allied with Germany, Italy, and Japan. When offered a diplomatic appointment in 1942, Ionesco accepted and relocated with his wife to France, never returning to Romania. He arrived in German-occupied France as a representative of the pro-Nazi Romanian government. In 1944, Ionesco's wife Rodica gave birth to their only child, Marie-France.

**Introducing the Theater of the Absurd** In 1949 Ionesco translated into French a play he had originally written in Romanian, *Englezeste fara profesor* (English without a Professor). A friend, Monica Lovinescu, introduced him to Nicolas Bataille, a young director, who produced the play in Paris in 1950 under the title *La Cantatrice chauve* (The Bald Soprano). The play failed miserably at its premiere, although it was enthusiastically received by prominent surrealists such as André Breton and Philippe Soupault. *La Cantatrice chauve* is an attack on bourgeois conformism and a reflection on the impossibility of communication. It remains a superb example of the Theater of the Absurd.

**Absurd Multiplicity** The problematic nature of language and communication is a dominant theme in Ionesco's early works, including his first two plays, *La Cantatrice chauve* (1950; The Bald Soprano) and *La Leçon* (1951; The Lesson). As his career progressed, Ionesco began to use multiplying objects as a metaphor for the absurdity of life. In one of his most acclaimed works, *Les Chaises* (1952; The Chairs), an elderly couple serves as hosts for an audience who assemble to hear a speaker deliver a message that will save the world. As the couple arranges seating for their guests, the stage becomes crowded with chairs. This image is symbolic of the irrational, foolish, or nonsensical.

**The Bérenger Plays** Beginning in the late 1950s, Ionesco wrote a number of plays that center on Bérenger, a

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ionesco's famous contemporaries include:

- Nicolae Ceaușescu** (1918–1989): Leader of Romania from 1965 to 1989 who was widely considered a dictator. He was executed, along with his wife, after the revolution overthrew him.
- Mikhail Gorbachev** (1931–): The last Communist leader of the Soviet Union, who helped end the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States. He was removed from office in a coup.
- Kim Philby** (1912–1988): British intelligence officer who was secretly a Communist and a spy for the Soviet Union. Classified information Philby passed along may have led to the deaths of many British and American intelligence agents.
- Odette Sansom** (1912–1995): French civilian who worked for the underground resistance movement during World War II. Captured and tortured by the Nazis, she refused to confess and was sent to a concentration camp, which she survived.
- Tristan Tzara** (1896–1963): Romanian playwright, artist, and poet. Cofounder of the Dada movement, Tzara rejected common standards of art and influenced the surrealist movement.

modern-day Everyman. The best known of these works is *Rhinocéros* (1959), which is considered one of Ionesco's most accessible plays. During the course of the play everyone except Bérenger is transformed into a rhinoceros. While the inspiration for this work came from Ionesco's reaction to a friend who joined the Nazi Party, the play's significance extends beyond the confines of any single ideology to denounce mindless conformity and mob mentality.

Other Bérenger plays include *Tueur sans gages* (1958; *The Killer*), in which Bérenger searches for a nameless killer to whom he falls prey, and *Le Roi se meurt* (1962; *Exit the King*), in which Bérenger is a king who is told he will soon die.

***Death and the Fantastic*** The subject of death becomes an overriding concern in many of Ionesco's later plays; for example, in *La Soif et la faim* (1964; *Hunger and Thirst*). The dreamlike images that pervade Ionesco's drama also become more prominent in his later works. In *L'Homme aux valises* (1975; *The Man with the Suitcases*) and *Voyages chez les morts* (1980; *Journeys among the Dead*), the protagonists engage in conversations with the dead. The episodic nature of these plays, coupled with their fantastic elements, creates the impression of a dream.

Best known as a dramatist, Ionesco has also written a novel, *Le Solitaire* (1972; *The Hermit*), and several vol-

umes of essays and criticism. These works, like his drama, are marked by a sense of anguish and a vehement opposition to totalitarianism and oppression.

Ionesco actively participated in conferences in support of human rights, wrote harsh indictments against the Romanian government as well as against other totalitarian regimes, and helped dissidents of such countries. Ionesco signed many petitions for freedom of speech and wrote articles against anti-Semitism and in support of the right to existence of the state of Israel. His ties to Romania became stronger after the 1989 revolution that brought down Nicolae Ceaușescu's dictatorship, at which time he acknowledged in interviews that he felt Romanian again. In the last decade of his life, he gave up writing and devoted himself to painting and exhibiting his works. He died in Paris on March 28, 1994.

### Works in Literary Context

With Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, and Jean Genet, Eugene Ionesco is widely recognized as a defining playwright of the Theater of the Absurd. Ionesco's originality largely consisted of his revolutionary rediscovery of language, which was influenced by his own rediscovery of language during his attempts to learn the English language. While studying, Ionesco came to view modern perspectives on language as absurd, and his ridicule of this "language worship" would later become a common theme in his works. It is notable that one of Ionesco's favorite authors was William Shakespeare, whom he considered to have been a precursor of the Theater of the Absurd.

***Thematic Evolution*** Ionesco's theater evolved during his career. His first plays focus more on language as a means of non-communication, as an expression of automatism and banality, and as a barrier to knowledge of the self and of others. Later, Ionesco became interested in the psychoanalytical aspect of memory and in revealing characters' inner worlds on stage, especially their deep anxieties and obsessions with death. His allusions to politics in the early plays turn into political statements in the later plays. Then, at the very end of his career, Ionesco's plays became highly autobiographical and oneiric.

### ***Ridicule of Language Worship and Conformity***

Ionesco was appalled by the hateful and violent anti-Semitic outbursts he had witnessed in Romania. He also was disturbed and mystified by the large number of intellectuals who fell prey to fascist ideologies and mass hysteria. *Rhinocéros*, his most successful play was inspired in part by the mass hysteria described by Denis de Rougemont in his report on a Nazi rally he attended in 1938 in Nuremberg. In his play, Ionesco seeks to represent the process by which human individuals are drawn into collectivities, appearing to undergo transformations so substantial as to strip them of their humanity. The deafening roar of the rhinoceroses in the play represents the overwhelming clamor characteristic of rallies such as the one in Nuremberg. The comical parallel dialogues in the first

scene underline the power of rhetoric more than the power of logic. Ultimately, however, Béranger—the protagonist, an ordinary man—refuses to conform, suggesting the possibility of individual choice despite social pressure.

The features of his drama directly and indirectly influenced contemporaries such as French playwright Jean Tardieu and Lebanese playwright Georges Schéhadé, as well as many of the innovative playwrights that emerged in his wake, including Spanish playwright Fernando Arrabal, French playwrights René de Obaldia and Roland Dubillard, English playwright Harold Pinter, and American playwright Sam Shepard.

### Works in Critical Context

Faulted as obscure by many critics at the beginning of his career, Ionesco's innovative drama has gained international acclaim, and a number of his works are now considered founding pieces of the Theater of the Absurd. His numerous accolades speak to the nature of this acclaim. Internationally, Ionesco was the recipient of many prestigious awards, including the Jerusalem Prize (1973), the Max Rheinhard Medal (1976), Germany's Order of Merit (1982), the University of Chicago's T. S. Eliot-Ingersoll Prize (1985), the Medal of the City of Paris (1987), and the Molière Prize (1989). In 1970 he was elected to the Académie française; he received the great Austrian Award for European Literature, and he was presented an honorary doctorate by the University of Tel-Aviv. In 1991 he became the first author whose work was published in the prestigious Editions Pléiade while still alive.

**Rhinocéros** Ionesco's three-act play *Rhinocéros* (produced and published 1959; translated as *Rhinoceros*, 1960), generally considered to be his masterpiece, has been performed to acclaim throughout the world. Adapted for the stage from his 1957 short story of the same title, it premiered in Paris at the state-subsidized Odéon-Théâtre de France under the direction of Jean-Louis Barrault, and "put the playwright on the international theatrical map," according to American critic Mel Gussow. The English version of the play was directed by Orson Welles and starred Laurence Olivier. Dramas like this were "called anti-theatre by many critics, despite the fact that all the theatrical elements are included," according to reviewers Jacques Guicharnaud and June Beckelman. However, as Guicharnaud and Beckelman go on to say, "such farce might be better termed *Théâtre en liberté* or liberated theatre, the mirror of the world as a non-sensical mechanism, mad in its ways, and thus giving the playwright complete freedom to indulge his fantasies."

### Responses to Literature

1. Discuss the way language is portrayed in the Theater of the Absurd. Do you find that language is inherently "problematic"? Explain your views citing specific examples from one of Ionesco's plays.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Dramatists in the Theater of the Absurd shared a vision of a hopeless, bewildered, and anxious humanity struggling vainly to find a purpose and to control its fate. Absurdist playwrights ignored most of the logical structures of traditional theater. Dramatic action is minimal; what action occurs only serves to underscore the absence of meaning in the characters' existence. Here are some works that take a similar approach to the stage:

*The Caretaker* (1959), a play by Harold Pinter. In this work, held together without any solid structure and filled with random dialogue and surrealism, a manipulative tramp disturbs the relationship between two brothers in this three-character play.

*The Maids* (1947), a play by Jean Genet. In this work, loosely based on a true story, two sisters play fantasy roles of mistress and maid and attempt to kill their real mistress.

*Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), a play by Luigi Pirandello. In this play, a group of actors are about to rehearse when six strangers walk in, explaining that they are unfinished fictional characters.

*Waiting for Godot* (1952), a play by Samuel Beckett. In this work, two characters wait in vain for a third, Godot, who never arrives.

2. In *Rhinocéros*, Ionesco explores the theme of how conformity can be dangerous. Drawing from the play, discuss your views about conforming. Do you think conforming can be a good thing? Is there such a thing as being too individualistic?
3. Using your library's resources and the Internet, research the beliefs behind the Theater of the Absurd. Write an essay that defines those principles and explains how you feel about them and the art they create.
4. The Theater of the Absurd developed starting in the late 1940s. What was going on in the world at that time that might lead to this view of life? Write an essay analyzing world events and how they might have influenced this movement.

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## ❑ Christopher Isherwood

BORN: 1904, Cheshire, England

DIED: 1986, Santa Monica, California

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Drama, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Mr. Norris Changes Trains* (1935)

*Goodbye to Berlin* (1939)

*The Condor and the Cows* (1949)

*A Single Man* (1964)

### Overview

Perhaps best known for his stories of Weimar, Germany, collected in *The Berlin Stories* (1946), which were later adapted for the play *I Am a Camera* (1951) and the stage musical and film *Cabaret* (1966 and 1972), Isherwood also made important headway in the portrayal of gay men both in his fiction and numerous volumes of memoirs. In addition, he had a lengthy career as a Hollywood screenwriter, and wrote and edited a number of books about his religious faith, Vedantism, aimed at western readers.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Cambridge and Auden** The son of a career military officer, Christopher William Bradshaw-Isherwood was born in High Lane, Cheshire, England, on August 26, 1904. He attended the Repton School from 1919 to 1922 and Cambridge University from 1924 to 1925. He left in 1925 without earning a degree, his undistinguished academic career ending when he gave mischievous and wrong answers to the questions on his final exams. His university year was significant because it was at Cambridge that he met Wystan Hugh Auden, with whom he later collaborated on several literary projects, and because it was there that he became a practicing homosexual, an orientation that played an important role in his personal and artistic life.

Auden, who quickly emerged as his generation's greatest poet, cast Isherwood in the role of literary men-



Christopher Isherwood Isherwood, Christopher, photograph. Hulton Archive / Getty Images.

tor and soon introduced him to a fellow Oxford undergraduate, Stephen Spender. The trio formed the nucleus of the "Auden Gang," young poets and novelists who dominated the English literary scene of the 1930s.

Isherwood worked for a year as the secretary to French violinist Andre Mangeot and as a private tutor in London. In his spare hours he worked on his first novel, *All the Conspirators*, published in 1928. The novel was poorly received.

**Berlin Period** In the period following World War I, Germany became a democratic nation known as the Weimar Republic. Since Germany was viewed as a primary cause behind the war, the new Weimar Republic was held responsible for repaying many of the costs of war to other countries, also known as war reparations. This, along with massive unemployment and other economic problems, led to runaway inflation that crippled the fledgling country and bred discontent among Germans. The situation worsened in 1929 with the onset of the Great Depression; in these dire circumstances, many German people gave their support to the Nazi Party and Adolf Hitler, who promised to restore Germany to its former glory.

In 1929 Isherwood followed Auden to Germany and was attracted to life in the crumbling Weimar Republic and particularly to the sexual freedom that existed there. As he so succinctly put it in his 1976 book *Christopher and His Kind 1929–1939*, “Berlin meant Boys.” He soon established a liaison with Berthold “Bubi” Szczesny, a bisexual ex-boxer, that lasted until Szczesny was forced to leave the country. Among the young men he met subsequently was one from the working-class section of Berlin. He took a room with this man’s family for a time and so became familiar with day-to-day living among the urban proletariat.

At first his stay in Germany was financed through an allowance provided by his only wealthy relative, his uncle Henry Isherwood. His uncle was also homosexual and seemed happy to assist his nephew in the quest for companions. Eventually, however, Uncle Henry stopped funding his nephew, and Isherwood began earning money tutoring in English. In this way he met Berliners from the upper classes.

Isherwood became fluent in German and got acquainted, as did Auden, with the expressionist drama of Ernst Toller, Georg Kaiser, and Bertolt Brecht. This led the two British artists to collaborate on three expressionist plays: *The Dog Beneath the Skin* (1935), *The Ascent of F6* (1937), and *A Melodrama in Three Acts: On the Frontier* (1938), of which the first two are considered more successful.

Meanwhile, Isherwood was working on two stories that would later become his most successful book, *The Berlin Stories* (1946). The book, comprised of the two short novels, *The Last of Mr. Norris* and *Goodbye to Berlin* presents an in-depth portrait of life in Germany’s capital as that republican center collapsed. The two novels set in Berlin are quite distinct, but in each Isherwood masters a unique voice, creates some of the most memorable characters in modern fiction, and movingly depicts a city in the process of internal decay. As explorations of the ways in which public and private concerns intersect, they are passionately engaged, haunted by the brooding specter of Nazism. Playwright John van Druten adapted *The Berlin Stories* for the stage in a play called *I Am a Camera* (1955), which was later adapted into the musical *Cabaret* (1967).

**Relocation** Isherwood and Auden traveled to China in 1938 and 1939 and published the part travel diary, part war chronicle *Journey to a War*, which describes the Sino-Japanese War. That conflict erupted in August 1937 and was a grim foreshadowing of World War II.

When World War II broke out in Europe, Isherwood and Auden came to America. The move made them enemies to many Britons, who saw them as fleeing the country in the face of oncoming war. Indeed, even three years later, in *Put Out More Flags*, novelist Evelyn Waugh, christening them Parsnip and Pimpernell, commented, “What I don’t see is how these two can claim to be contemporary if they run away from the biggest event in contemporary history.”

Isherwood was a conscientious objector during World War II and became a U.S. citizen in 1946. During World War II he wrote scripts for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Warner Brothers, and 20th Century Fox film studios. He also worked for a year in a refugee center in Haverford, Pennsylvania.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Isherwood’s famous contemporaries include:

**W. H. Auden** (1907–1973): An English poet known for his mastery of tone, form, and content, his poetry touched on such subjects as love, citizenship, morality, and nature.

**Igor Stravinsky** (1882–1971): Widely considered to be the most influential composer of twentieth-century music. A quintessentially cosmopolitan Russian, Stravinsky was named by *Time* magazine as one of the one hundred most influential people of the twentieth century.

**Dorothy Parker** (1893–1967): An American writer and poet best known for her wisecracks, caustic wit, and sharp eye for twentieth-century urban problems.

**Aldous Huxley** (1894–1963): An English author best known for his dystopian novels, he also published a wide range of essays, short stories, poetry, travel writings, and scripts.

**Jiddu Krishnamurti** (1895–1986): An Indian public speaker and author who focused most often on such topics as enacting positive change, meditation, and human relationships.

In 1953, he fell in love with eighteen-year-old college student, Don Bachardy, who was to achieve independent success as a portrait artist. The relationship was to last the rest of Isherwood’s life. At the conclusion of his 1976 biography, *Christopher and His Kind*, he described Bachardy as “the ideal companion to whom you can reveal yourself totally and yet be loved for what you are, not what you pretend to be.” During the 1970s and 1980s Isherwood and Bachardy were active participants in the burgeoning American Gay Liberation movement, a movement that Isherwood’s work of the 1950s and 1960s had anticipated and inspired.

**Hindu Spirituality** Isherwood became increasingly involved in the Vedantist religion, a branch of Hinduism focusing on the true nature of reality. He edited and wrote several volumes about the religion between 1945 and 1969. He explained the religion’s basic tenets as follows: “We have two selves—an apparent, outer self and an invisible, inner self. The apparent self claims to be an individual and as such, other than all other individuals. . . . The real self is unchanging and immortal.”

Isherwood did not confine himself solely to religious writings, however. He authored such novels as *Prater Violet* (1945), *The World in the Evening* (1954), and *A Single Man* (1964), the novel in which he most successfully combines the themes that preoccupied him during the second half of his career: religion and homosexuality. *A Meeting by the River* (1967), his last novel, deals with his religion. He also wrote the travel book *The Condor*

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Christopher Isherwood was a pioneer of gay literature. Here are some authors who have tread similar ground:

*Tales of the City* (1978), a collection of fiction by Armistead Maupin. This work is actually the first in a series of novels that started out as serialized stories in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The stories paint a vivid description of San Francisco life in the 1970s and 1980s, often with a comedic touch.

*Giovanni's Room* (1956), a novel by James Baldwin. Controversial upon its initial release for its explicit homosexual content, this novel by African American novelist Baldwin examines a single night in the life of a white American contemplating his lover's death.

*Father of Frankenstein* (1995), a novel by Christopher Bram. Made into the award-winning film *Gods and Monsters*, this poignant novel tells the story of Frankenstein director James Whale and his life as a closeted homosexual in the Golden Age of Hollywood.

*and the Cows* (1949), which provides a memorable summation of his attitude toward travel.

In addition to his novels and travel writing, Isherwood also published autobiographical volumes and the collection of stories, articles, and poems titled *Exhumations* (1966). He also wrote film scripts and taught at California State University, Los Angeles, the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the University of California, Los Angeles.

During the 1970s and 1980s Isherwood concentrated on writing nonfiction, including *Kathleen and Frank* (1971), a biography of his parents, and *Christopher and His Kind* (1976), a memoir of the years in Berlin that inspired *The Berlin Stories*. He also continued to write about his religious experiences, as in *My Guru and His Disciple* (1980).

Isherwood lived and worked in Southern California until his death from cancer on January 4, 1986.

### Works in Literary Context

Most of Isherwood's fiction was based upon diaries, and it is consequently imbued with what David Thomas describes as "the verité of actual events with an acute sense of specific place and time." Some key themes that run through Isherwood's work, not surprisingly, tend to center on his sexuality. His autobiographical works attempt to explain the personal myths he created for himself and the artistic, intellectual, sexual, and spiritual values that those works embody. His commitment to gay liberation, then, appears in both his nonfiction and fiction works.

**Homosexuality and Alienation** Christopher Isherwood was one of the first authors to treat homosexuality in a nonsensationalist vein. The impact of Isherwood's

homosexuality on his writing is pervasive and incalculable, felt both directly and indirectly. His interest lay in certain psychological predicaments and in recurring character types and themes. He was also fascinated by the antiheroic hero, rebellion against middle-class respectability, and "The Lost" (his code name for the alienated and the excluded). All are related to his awareness of himself as a homosexual. Even when represented as suppressed or disguised for legal or artistic reasons, homosexuality is a felt presence in Isherwood's novels. It is a crucial component of the myth of the outsider that he developed so painstakingly. It is a symbol not merely of alienation and isolation, but also of individuality.

In his early works, Isherwood presents homosexuality unapologetically. He domesticates aspects of gay life that other writers sensationalized, and he reveals considerable insight into the dynamics of gay relationships. His first novel, *All the Conspirators*, indicts the repression of homosexual feelings, a motif that will recur throughout his career. His second novel, *The Memorial* (1932), portrays a homosexual's grief at the loss of his best friend in World War I. *The Berlin Stories* depicts a wide range of homosexual characters, from Baron Kuno von Pregnitz, whose secret fantasies revolve around English schoolboy adventure stories, to Peter Wilkinson and Otto Nowak, who share a spoiled homosexual idyll on Reugen Island. In this work the unhappiness that plagues the gay characters is attributed not to their homosexuality but to their infection with the soul sickness that denies life and distorts reality, an infection they share with everyone else in the doomed city. In the early works, homosexual characters are juxtaposed with heterosexual ones to reveal beneath their apparent polarities a shared reality of a deadened spirit.

**Sexual Minorities as a Political Force** Isherwood's American novels, beginning with *The World in the Evening*, focus more directly on the political aspects of being homosexual in a homophobic society. In these novels, Isherwood anticipates the concerns of the nascent gay liberation movement, as he presents homosexuals as a legitimate minority in a sea of minorities that constitute Western democracies. By conceiving of homosexuals as an aggrieved minority, Isherwood both softens the social and religious stigma linked to them and encourages solidarity among their ranks. He also implies the possibility of a political backlash to injustice by forming alliances with other disadvantaged minorities. The dilemma faced by the homosexual characters in Isherwood's later novels is crystallized in their apparently irreconcilable needs to assert their individuality and to feel a sense of community.

**The Need for Community** In Isherwood's *A Single Man*, the need for community is also an issue. The novel more fully develops the context of gay oppression and places it within a still larger context of spiritual transcendence. *A Single Man* regards the assertions of individual uniqueness and minority consciousness as necessary

worldly and political goals, but it finally subsumes them in the Vedantic idea of the universal consciousness.

### Works in Critical Context

Isherwood's problematic status in modern literature comes from a history of sharply divided critical opinion best summarized by author G. K. Hall: "Christopher Isherwood has always been a problem for the critics. An obviously talented writer, he has refused to exploit his artistry for either commercial success or literary status. . . . Isherwood was adjudged a 'promising writer'—a designation that he has not been able to outrun even to this day." As if to underscore this point, author Gore Vidal has called Isherwood "the best prose writer in English."

*Journey to a War* Isherwood's nonfiction writings earned ambivalent reviews. Reviews of *Journey to a War* tended to be essentially positive, but Mildred Boie of *The Atlantic* took issue because the book was not "original and profound." Another critic accused Isherwood and Auden of being tourists at a war, a curious criticism given Isherwood and Auden's great sympathy for the suffering around them. In his 1939 *The Nation* review, Lincoln Kirsten offered possibly the most accurate summation of what Isherwood and Auden achieved when he called the book "perhaps the most intense record of China at war yet written in English."

### Responses to Literature

1. Compare Christopher Isherwood's treatment of homosexuality in Berlin in the 1920s and 1930s to its treatment in the movie adaptation of his work, *Cabaret*. How do the treatments differ? How are they the same?
2. In *Journey to a War*, how does Isherwood go about reporting and analyzing what he sees in China? Is he simply a "tourist" as some critics suggested?
3. Bob Wood, the main character in *The World in the Evening*, fantasizes about marching "down the street with a banner saying, 'We're queer because we're queer because we're queer.'" Why would this have been a virtual impossibility in the 1940s, the time in which the novel was set? Using your library and the Internet, find out what restrictions, legal and social, were placed on homosexuals at the time.
4. Using your library and the Internet, research the early gay civil rights movement—particularly the Mattachine Society and the Stonewall Riots. Write a short essay summarizing your findings.

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### Kazuo Ishiguro

BORN: 1954, Nagasaki, Japan

NATIONALITY: Japanese, English

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*A Pale View of Hills* (1982)

*An Artist of the Floating World* (1986)

*The Remains of the Day* (1989)

*The Unconsoled* (1995)

*Never Let Me Go* (2005)



Kazuo Ishiguro. Ishiguro, Kazuo, photograph. AP Images.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ishiguro's famous contemporaries include:

- Mo Yan** (1955–): Chinese novelist whose work is often banned by the Chinese government.
- Tobias Wolff** (1945–): American memoirist and novelist, most famous for the book *This Boy's Life*.
- J. M. Coetzee** (1940–): South African novelist whose works often address the serious problems facing South Africa in the postapartheid era.
- Tony Blair** (1953–): Former prime minister of the United Kingdom and an important ally of the United States in the years following the September 11, 2001, attack.
- Hayao Miyazaki** (1941–): Japanese animator and director responsible for many popular animated films, including *Princess Mononoke* and *Spirited Away*.

### Overview

Kazuo Ishiguro is best known for his third novel, *The Remains of the Day* (1989), which won the Booker Prize, one of England's most prestigious literary awards. The language and tone of Ishiguro's novels are controlled, delicate, and formal. His protagonists often deceive themselves about the lives they have lived and the choices they have made. Ishiguro's novels are emotional journeys whereby these characters search for the truth and meaning of their lives. In the end, some characters continue to exist with their delusions, while others feel the pain of understanding that they have lived their lives poorly.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Leaving Japan** Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, Japan, on November 8, 1954. Just over a decade earlier, in 1945, Nagasaki was one of two cities nearly destroyed by U.S. atomic bomb attacks during World War II; it is estimated that upwards of eighty thousand people were killed as a result of the attack on Nagasaki. Ishiguro would consider the aftermath of this attack in his novel *An Artist of the Floating World*. Ishiguro moved with his parents to Guilford, Surrey, England, in 1960, where his father, an oceanographer, was to be temporarily employed by the British government. Though the family left with the expectation of returning to Japan after a year or two, the assignment was repeatedly renewed, until they found themselves settled in England permanently.

**"Services to Literature"** Ishiguro was educated at the Woking County Grammar School for Boys in Surrey, then studied American literature at the University of Kent, earning an honors degree in English and philosophy in 1978. He found employment as a social worker, first in Glasgow, Scotland, and, after graduating from Kent, in London. While working in London, Ishiguro pursued an interest in fiction by enrolling in the creative writing program at the University of East Anglia, where he received a master of arts degree in 1980.

**A Fading Memory** Ishiguro has said that his initial interest in writing fiction was as a way of preserving memories of Japan that were beginning to fade, and he attributes his meteoric rise, in part, to his Japanese name and the Japanese subject matter in his first two novels: *A Pale View of the Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*. His first novel was published a year after Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* won the 1981 Booker Prize, and, as Ishiguro recalled in a 1991 *Mississippi Review* interview, "everyone was suddenly looking for other Rushdies." Ishiguro later took pains to battle the assumption that he only had interest in Japan-related fiction.

**International Success** Ishiguro's greatest success came with a novel about distinctly British characters. *The Remains of the Day* centers on the life of a loyal English butler who recalls his years of service in diary form. The novel was adapted for screen in an acclaimed 1993 film of the same name.

Ishiguro followed up his success with *When We Were Orphans*, which was short-listed for the Booker Prize. His 2005 novel *Never Let Me Go*, a dystopia novel with science fiction elements, also captured wide critical acclaim. He lives and works in London.

### Works in Literary Context

**The Unreliable Narrator** A consistent element in Ishiguro's first four novels is his fascination with narrative unreliability, which he takes considerably beyond the familiar techniques of writers such as Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford, where the narrators' account of events can be trusted, if not their interpretations or explanations of those events. In his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, for example, Ishiguro's narrator fabricates not only motives but also actions and even characters.

In his later fiction, Ishiguro's challenge is to surprise the reader with some unanticipated permutation of unreliability, which he achieves through multiple levels of complexity. In *An Artist of the Floating World*, the narrator's unreliability seems to involve his initial denial of wrongdoing in prewar Japan, and only after he has recalled and accepted responsibility for those increasingly reprehensible activities does the reader grasp that the activities themselves never took place. In *The Remains of the Day*, this greater level of complication



is achieved through the narrator's memories of two involvements, one a reluctantly revealed romantic relationship and the other an even more guarded political venture, which both transpired at Darlington Hall over the same fourteen-year period. And in *The Unconsoled*, Ishiguro subverts even physical laws by expanding the realm of unreliability from the past to the present in order to make the external world a projection of the narrator's contorted psychology.

### Works in Critical Context

Each of Ishiguro's novels has met with critical acclaim, and several have won prestigious awards: *A Pale View of Hills* won the Winifred Holtby Award from the Royal Society of Literature in 1983; *An Artist of the Floating World* won the Whitbread Literary Award in 1986; and *The Remains of the Day* won the Booker Prize. Critics have praised Ishiguro's elegant and precise use of language and his controlled style of storytelling.

***A Pale View of Hills*** Reviewing *A Pale View of Hills* in the *Spectator*, Francis King found the novel "typically Japanese in its compression, its reticence and in its exclusion of all details not absolutely essential to its theme." While some reviewers agreed with *Times Literary Supplement* writer Paul Bailey—who stated "that at certain points I could have done with something as crude as a fact"—many felt that Ishiguro's delicate layering of themes and images grants the narrative great evocative power. "[It] is a beautiful and dense novel, gliding from level to level of consciousness," remarked Jonathan Spence, in *New Society*. "Ishiguro develops [his themes] with remarkable insight and skill," concurred Rosemary Roberts in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*. "They are described in controlled prose that more often hints than explains or tells. The effect evokes mystery and an aura of menace." And King deemed the novel "a memorable and moving work, its elements of past and present, of Japan and England held together by a shimmering, all but invisible net of images linked to each other by filaments at once tenuous and immensely strong." Roberts also complimented the author's optimistic approach to the material: "There is nobility in determination to press on with life even against daunting odds. Ishiguro has brilliantly captured this phoenixlike spirit; high praise to him."

***The Remains of the Day*** *The Remains of the Day* met with highly favorable critical response. Galen Strawson, for example, praised the novel in the *Times Literary Supplement*: "*The Remains of the Day* is as strong as it is delicate, a very finely nuanced and at times humorous study of repression." Strawson also states, "It is a strikingly original book, and beautifully made... Stevens'... language creates a context which allows Kazuo Ishiguro to put a massive charge of pathos into a single unremarkable phrase." In the *Chicago Tribune*, Joseph Coates described the novel as "an ineffably sad and beautiful piece of work—a tragedy in the form of a comedy of manners." He continued: "Rarely has the device of an unreliable narrator worked such char-

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Ishiguro is one of many authors who have employed unreliable narrators to great effect. Here are a few examples of texts written with unreliable narrators:

*House of Leaves* (2000), a novel by Mark Z. Danielewski.

This novel contains a number of narrators, including a blind man who describes the visual details of a film, thereby undercutting any authority he otherwise would have had as a narrator.

*Rashômon* (1950), a film directed by Akira Kurosawa. In this film, four different characters all relate their versions of a tragic meeting in a grove between a bandit and a samurai and his wife. The samurai's testimony is offered through a medium, since he was killed, and the fourth witness—a woodcutter—openly admits to being untruthful in his first account.

*Lolita* (1955), a novel by Vladimir Nabokov. This story is told from the point of view of a pedophile, who claims that his victim seduced him.

*The Sound and the Fury* (1929), a novel by William Faulkner. This tale of a family in crisis is told from the point of view of a mentally disabled person, allowing all sorts of convolutions of the truth that require the reader to work harder to discover what actually happened to the family in question.

acter revelation as it does here." Mark Kamine cited Ishiguro's technique in the *New Leader*: "Usually the butler's feelings are hidden in painfully correct periphrasis, or refracted in dialogue spoken by other characters.... Few writers dare to say so little of what they mean as Ishiguro."

While many reviews of *The Remains of the Day* were favorable, this was not universally so. Writing for the *New Statesman*, Geoff Dyer wondered "if the whole idea of irony as a *narrative strategy* hasn't lost its usefulness." Dyer worried that Stevens' voice had been "*coaxed* in the interests of the larger ironic scheme of the novel." Comparing the novelist to Henry James, however, Hermione Lee defended Ishiguro's style in *New Republic*: "To accuse Ishiguro of costive, elegant minimalism is to miss the deep sadness, the boundless melancholy that opens out, like the 'deserts of vast eternity' his characters are reluctantly contemplating, under the immaculate surface."

### Responses to Literature

1. Read Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* and Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. Each text uses an unreliable narrator but in very different ways. In a short essay, describe how each narrator is unreliable and evaluate the purpose of this unreliability for each novel. Then briefly evaluate the effectiveness of each text.

2. Read *A Pale View of Hills*, which concerns the aftermath of the bombing of Nagasaki. Then, using the Internet and the library, research the historical events surrounding the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan. Based on your research, how well do you think Ishiguro portrays the aftermath of this important historical event?
3. Much of what Ishiguro does in his writing is try to reconstruct Japan based on his memories of it from when he was no older than six. Try to reconstruct some place you visited as a child, providing as many descriptive details as you can.
4. Ishiguro describes how he thinks his works are viewed differently because he has a “Japanese name” and a “Japanese face.” Read *A Pale View of Hills*. How do you think your response would be different to this text if Ishiguro did not have a Japanese name or a Japanese face? Do you think any novel depicting a culture is inherently less genuine if it is created by someone from outside the culture? Why or why not?

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## Kobayashi Issa

BORN: 1763, Kashiwabara, Japan

DIED: 1827, Kashiwabara, Japan

NATIONALITY: Japanese

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

*Tabishui* (1795)

*Chichi no shuen nikki* (1801)

*The Year of My Life* (1819)

## Overview

Kobayashi Issa was a Japanese poet whose verse used unadorned language to express the concerns of the common man. He is one of the best-known and most widely read of all haiku poets and perhaps the most popular among present-day readers.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Student of Haiku** Kobayashi Issa, the son of a farmer, was born in Kashiwabara, Shinano province (now part of Shinano Town, Nagano Prefecture), Japan. His father was widowed a few years after Issa was born. Issa was raised by his grandmother until his father remarried. During this period, he started to study haiku under a local poet, Shimpō.

At the age of fourteen, his father sent him to Edo (present-day Tokyo) to study haiku under the poets Mizoguchi Sogan and Norokuan Chikua. Issa’s poetry caught the attention of Seibi Natsume, who later became his patron. Although Issa’s poems became more and more known, he remained extremely poor and was forced to travel frequently and work hard to survive.

**Struggles and Sorrows** Issa faced personal and financial troubles for much of his life. His difficulties with his stepmother began when she gave birth to a son and jealously desired that her own child should receive more attention than her stepson. Issa complained that he was beaten “a hundred times a day” as a young child. When his father died, Issa faced further difficulties with his stepmother, who blocked him from inheriting his father’s property.

At the age of fifty, after over a decade of disputes with his stepmother and stepbrother, Issa finally inherited the property of his father. This allowed him to return to Kashiwabara and settle. He married a young woman and started a family.

In Issa’s later years, his sorrows returned. His children and then his wife died, and his property was destroyed by fire. His new wife, who came from a local samurai family, left him after a few weeks of marriage. He married again for a third time but died only a year later.

## Works in Literary Context

**The Haiku Form** Issa was a prolific writer who produced over twenty thousand haiku along with hundreds of tanka. Haiku is a poetic form that consists of three lines, the first and last containing five syllables (or similar sound units known in Japanese as *on*), and the second containing seven. Tanka are similar to haiku, but contain two additional lines of seven *on* each. Issa is probably the best-loved of the Japanese haiku masters. His poetry’s style is more robust and subjective than the austere, priestly style of Bashō (1644–1694) or the worldly, sophisticated style of Buson (1716–1783).

**Joy amid Sorrow** Although Issa faced many struggles during his lifetime, his poetry celebrated life’s serene moments and extolled the joys of simplicity. His poems have given consolation to generations of readers due to the confessions

of doubts and loneliness found in his highly personal haiku. He also brought humor to the treatment of his subjects, and he excelled at giving affectionate portrayals of such creatures as fleas, frogs, and sparrows. Issa's poems about animals and insects are studied by Japanese schoolchildren to this day.

### Works in Critical Context

Issa gained notoriety for his poems at an early age, and he continued to enjoy a good reputation throughout his life. He was considered one of the living masters of haiku. He continues to enjoy a highly favorable reputation and is considered, along with Bashō and Buson, one of the three great haiku masters of all time.

Issa was seen as having a rejuvenating effect on the haiku form, and his legacy continues to the present. His poems are still translated, collected, and widely read nearly two centuries after their original composition.

### Responses to Literature

1. Critics have noted that Issa's poetry is a celebration of life's joys despite the fact that he faced a lifetime of struggles and sorrow. Can you detect any of his sorrows in his poetry? In what ways can his poems be seen as relating to his struggle-filled life?
2. Issa wrote two centuries ago, but present-day readers often draw consolation from his poetry. What aspects of the universal human condition does Issa touch on that make his poetry continue to have relevance and resonance with contemporary readers? What in his style enables his poetry to continue to speak to readers through the centuries?
3. Issa wrote over twenty thousand haiku in his lifetime, but critics and readers have noted central themes running throughout much of his verse. Write an essay that identifies and discusses one or two of Issa's recurring themes. Be sure to use examples from his poetry to illustrate and support your claims.
4. Using Issa as a model, write a haiku about a simple, joyful moment in your life.

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## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Issa's famous contemporaries include:

**Robert Burns** (1759–1796): Burns was a Scottish Romantic poet widely regarded as the national poet of Scotland.

**Eli Whitney** (1765–1825): Whitney was an American inventor best known for creating the cotton gin.

**François-René de Chateaubriand** (1768–1848): Chateaubriand was a French writer and politician widely considered the founder of French Romanticism.

**Napoléon Bonaparte** (1769–1821): Bonaparte was a French general and politician who led the French Empire after the French Revolution.

**Ludwig van Beethoven** (1770–1827): Beethoven was a German composer widely considered to be one of the greatest musical talents of all time.

**William Wordsworth** (1770–1850): Wordsworth was an English poet who helped launch the Romantic age in English literature.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many of Issa's affectionate portrayals of animals and insects were intended to convey the simple joys of life. Here are some other works with a similar approach:

*Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926), a children's book by A. A. Milne. This popular children's book shows the simple joys of childhood through depictions of the lighthearted adventures of a stuffed bear and his friends.

*Ogden Nash's Zoo* (1986), a poetry collection by Ogden Nash. This collection of humorous poems about animals presents a whimsical, often nonsensical view on life.

*Black Swan/White Crow* (1995), poems by J. Patrick Lewis. This collection of thirteen haiku-inspired poems conjures unforgettable images with delicate, simple verse.



## Alfred Jarry

BORN: 1873, Laval, France

DIED: 1907, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Drama, fiction, nonfiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

*King Ubu* (1896)



Alfred Jarry Jarry, Alfred, photograph.

## Overview

Often considered a major influence on the theater of the twentieth century, Alfred Jarry's plays are forerunners of the theater of the absurd of Samuel Beckett, Antonin Artaud, and Eugène Ionesco and influenced the Dadaists and surrealists as well. *Ubu Roi* (translated as either *King Ubu* or *King Turd*) is Jarry's most famous and influential work. Regarded by some critics as combining elements from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*, *Ubu Roi* essentially eliminates all of Shakespeare's dramatic action and interjects scatological humor and farcical situations to comment on art, literature, politics, and current events.

## Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Rebellious Youth** Alfred Jarry, born on September 8, 1873, was the son of a traveling salesman and a mother who was a member of a fallen aristocratic family with a long history of mental illness. When Jarry was a small child, his mother divorced his father and moved her son and daughter to the rugged, isolated coast of Brittany in northern France. Here Jarry—a precocious child—began writing poetry and developed his taste for the macabre, especially as his own mother began exhibiting eccentric-

ities and signs of mental illness. In 1888 Jarry entered school in Rennes. A brilliant student, Jarry won prizes in foreign languages and science as a youth. Even at this early age, however, the rebelliousness and caustic wit that would mark his life and career were already apparent. With his schoolmates, Jarry staged bawdy lampoons of Felix Hebert, his physics teacher, whom he regarded as incompetent and physically repulsive. Jarry remained obsessed with the figure of Hebert for the rest of his life, using him as the model for the title character of *Ubu Roi*.

### ***Becoming Ubu: Bizarre Behavior and Ill Health in Late Life***

After failing a series of exams, Jarry moved to Paris and quickly became associated with the French symbolist movement spearheaded by Stéphane Mallarmé and André Gide. Jarry wrote prolifically and finally met with crowning success with the first production of *Ubu Roi* in 1896. Afterward, however, Jarry fell into a decline during which he exhibited many of the traits of mental illness suffered by his mother. During his later years, which were marked by bizarre behavior, drug and alcohol abuse, and ill health, Jarry began to affect the mannerisms of Ubu, speaking in a droning monotone and walking in a jerky, robot-like fashion. By the time of his death in 1907, at the age of thirty-four, he was known less as a writer than as an often-homeless, eccentric denizen of the bohemian Parisian neighborhood of Montparnasse. He died from health problems relating to his continued alcoholism and use of ether.

## Works in Literary Context

**Against Realism** Inspired by Mallarmé's challenge that realism was "a banal sacrilege of the true meaning of art" the symbolists during the turn of the century in France organized a reaction against realistic art and theater. Although he was not a symbolist in the orthodox sense, Alfred Jarry became a participant in this campaign. Jarry devoted much of his energy to a critique of realistic theater that reached a climax: a defiant gesture with the release of *Ubu Roi* upon the Paris stage.

Jarry's attack against realistic theater warrants study not just for its vehemence, but for its significance in the evolution of the modern theater. Out of his reaction against realism and his search for a more viable alternative, Jarry developed the ideas and engaged in the experiments that made him a forerunner of both the theater of cruelty and the theater of the absurd.

**Proposal for a New Theater** Jarry's proposals for a new theater centered on two conditions, both of which appear to have developed out of his critique of the realistic theater: 1) the need to "create new life" in the theater by creating a new type of character, and 2) the need to transcend the "things that happen all the time to the common man." He fulfilled these conditions by creating Pere Ubu, a creature whose actions are irrefutably logical, but whose *raison d'être* is "to kill everyone."

The plot of *Ubu Roi* is driven by Ma Ubu, whose husband, Pa Ubu, is the former king of Aragon and the current aide to the king of Poland. Ma Ubu pressures her husband to kill the king, which he does with the help of Captain Macnure. As the new king of Poland, Pa Ubu eliminates the nobility, the judiciary, and the bankers. He then sets out to collect his own taxes, harshly punishing those who object to the exorbitant amounts of money he demands. In the end, the Ubuses are driven out of Poland to exile in France. Claude Schumacher of *International Dictionary of Theatre* wrote, “In *Ubu Roi* all the basic dramaturgical conventions are deliberately subverted and it is the iconoclastic nature of the play that makes it such an important landmark in contemporary world drama.”

**Forerunner of the Theater of the Absurd** Jarry’s plays are forerunners of the theater of the absurd of Beckett, Artaud, and Ionesco and influenced the Dadaists and surrealists as well. *Ubu Roi* is clearly Jarry’s most successful and influential work, but in many ways it is little different from the rest of his oeuvre. *Ubu enchaîné* and *Ubu cocu* offer further variations on the same crude protagonist. Even in such essays as “De l’inutilité de theatre au theatre” and “Questions de theatre,” Jarry attempted to explain the theoretical framework and rationale for the farcical tone and techniques of his plays. Similarly, *Gestes et opinions du Docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien* (*Exploits and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll, Pataphysician*) is a work of fiction that presents the tenets of pataphysics—the science of absurd creations. Although Jarry’s plays have had the greatest impact, his prose has also been praised. Roger Shattuck commented, “Jarry writes in a highly compressed, poetic, often mock-heroic prose that requires careful reading. Yet the sentences move at headlong speed and draw the reader unexpectedly into the action.”

### Works in Critical Context

**The Riots** Jarry did not have to wait long for critical recognition. On the night of *Ubu Roi*’s first performance, riots broke out in the theater. Among those sitting in the audience for the opening night were Arthur Symons, William Butler Yeats, and Stéphane Mallarmé. Martin Esslin wrote, “Yeats rightly sensed that the scandalous performance marked the end of an era in art.” While Yeats wrote of being stunned and saddened by the play, Mallarmé was much more enthusiastic: “You have put before us, with a rare and enduring glaze at your fingertips, a prodigious personage and his crew, and this is a sober and sure dramatic sculptor. He enters into a repertoire of high taste and haunts me.”

**Later Recognition and Influence** Contemporary critics now recognize Jarry’s contribution to literature as a forerunner of the theater of the absurd. Jarry’s rejection of realism and general principles were later taken up and more fully developed by Antonin Artaud, who saw the-

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Jarry’s famous contemporaries include:

**Joseph Conrad** (1866–1953): This Polish author is considered by many to be one of the most remarkable novelists to write in the English language, his most studied work being *Heart of Darkness* (1899).

**William Butler Yeats** (1865–1939): Often credited with driving the Irish Literary Revival, this poet and dramatist is regarded as one of the most prominent literary figures of the twentieth century and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923.

**Pablo Picasso** (1881–1973): This Spanish artist is often credited with founding the cubist movement.

**André Breton** (1896–1966): Author and theorist, this Frenchman studied medicine and psychiatry but is most remembered as the founder of surrealism.

ater as a medium for symbolic suggestion. Through Artaud and through Albert Camus, Jarry’s ideas have continued to live and to produce a new and entirely different drama in the works of the current school of avant-garde writers.

### Responses to Literature

1. Describe the character Pa Ubu. Choosing specific examples from Jarry’s play, explain your emotional reaction to both his personality and his actions.
2. Discuss the motivation for the two sequels to *Ubu Roi*.
3. Jarry’s plays are often considered forerunners to later existential, absurdist, Dadaist, and surrealist works. Choose three of these four movements and identify several elements of each in Jarry’s most famous play, *Ubu Roi*.
4. Describe Jarry’s contributions to theater of the absurd.

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## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many of Jarry's protagonists are crude, insignificant nobodies. For example, Pa Ubu is fat, ugly, and extremely unpleasant. This focus on characters that lack control over various aspects of their being in the world raises questions about the relative insignificance of humanity as a whole and the absurdity of the human condition. Other works that explore these themes include:

*The Metamorphosis* (1915), a novella by Franz Kafka. In this tale, Gregor Samsa, an ordinary traveling salesman, wakes up only to find that his body has been transformed into an enormous bug.

*Nausea* (1938), a novel by Jean-Paul Sartre. In this existential novel, a historian is overtaken by a sense of nausea as he becomes increasingly convinced that his freedom and ability to discern his being in the world is inhibited by objects and situations.

*Waiting for Godot* (1953), a play by Samuel Beckett. In this absurdist tragicomedy, the characters wait for someone named Godot, who fails to arrive.

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966), a play by Tom Stoppard. This play follows the travels of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two minor characters from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

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## Elfriede Jelinek

BORN: 1946, Mürzzuschlag, Styria, Austria

NATIONALITY: Austrian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

*Women as Lovers* (1975)

*Wonderful, Wonderful Times* (1980)

*The Piano Teacher* (1983)

*Lust* (1989)

### Overview

Austrian novelist Elfriede Jelinek was the surprise choice for the 2004 Nobel Prize in Literature. Jelinek's fiction, relatively unknown outside of the German-speaking world, is rife with passages of psychological and physical

cruelty, reflecting its author's belief that all humans carry an overpowering degree of inner turmoil and that the world is a tremendously unjust place, especially for women.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Writing Through the Dark** Jelinek was born on October 20, 1946, as her native Austria was still struggling from the aftereffects of World War II and the country's 1938 annexation by Nazi Germany. Although born in a town in the state of Styria, she grew up in Vienna. Her mother was a Roman Catholic of mixed Romanian and German heritage, while Jelinek's surname reflects her father's origins in Czechoslovakia. He was Jewish and had escaped deportation to the Nazi extermination camps because he was a chemist working in a highly sensitive field. Jelinek was the couple's only child and emerged as a musical prodigy at a young age. Her childhood years were filled with after-school lessons in organ, violin, and flute, as well as ballet classes, and she entered the esteemed Vienna Conservatory of Music when she was still in her teens.

By 1964 an eighteen-year-old Jelinek had completed her conservatory courses but suffered a nervous breakdown before her exam date. She later said that writing helped her out of this dark period in her life and she turned toward a new direction in her studies when she began taking courses in theater and art history at the University of Vienna. She also began to gain a measure of renown for her poetry in Austria, and her first book, a collection of poems titled *Lisa's Shadow* appeared in 1967 and marked her as a rising young literary star.

**Successful Novels and Controversial Plays** Jelinek eventually completed her Vienna Conservatory of Music exam in the organ; afterward, she began traveling throughout Europe. She spent time in Berlin and Rome and worked on her debut novel, *Wir sind Lockvögel, Baby!* (We're Decoys, Baby!), published in 1970. She garnered impressive reviews for her 1975 novel, *Die Liebhaberinnen*, which would later be translated into English as *Women as Lovers*. Strongly feminist and even Marxist sentiments about women's roles in contemporary society ran through the novel's subtext. One of Jelinek's next novels, *Die Ausgesperrten*, published in 1980 and translated as *Wonderful, Wonderful Times*, was also hailed as a literary tour-de-force.

In the 1980s, Jelinek wrote a number of plays that were performed in Vienna, Germany, and Switzerland. In Austria, they drew a large amount of criticism for their incendiary themes. In some stagings of Jelinek's plays, boos erupted from the audience, and the merits of her work were usually the subject of ardent debate in the press. Jelinek's plays eventually drew the ire of Austrian cultural authorities, who in 1998 briefly banned their



Elfriede Jelinek Jelinek, Elfriede, photograph. Roland Schlager / EPA / Landov.

production because of their intense fixation on Austria's Nazi past. Her response was to sharpen her pen even more. The rise of right-wing politician Jörg Haider and his Freedom Party in 2000 elections prompted Jelinek to declare that she would refuse to let any of her plays be performed in Austria as long as he remained in office. Haider had been a staunch critic of her work and even termed it "degenerate," the term the Nazi regime had attached to modern art in the 1930s.

**International Recognition** Jelinek came to greater attention outside of the German-speaking world due to the popularity of her 1983 novel *Die Klavierspielerin*, which appeared in English translation as *The Piano Teacher* five years later and in 2001 was made into a French-language film by Austrian director Michael Haneke. The adaptation took several prizes at the Cannes Film Festival.

Jelinek was awarded a top German literary honor, the Heinrich Heine Prize, in 2002, before her Nobel Prize win was announced in October of 2004. She was only the tenth woman in 103 years of Nobel history to win in the literature category.

## Works in Literary Context

The satirical-critical Eastern European-Jewish strand in Austrian literature represented by Joseph Roth, Karl Kraus, Elias Canetti, and Ödön von Horváth persists in the work of Elfriede Jelinek. She shares with these authors mixed ethnic and cultural roots, a profound respect for language, and a commitment to using language to expose abuses of power. Because of the nontraditional aesthetic method she employs—her refusal to project herself into her characters' minds and her portrayal of the destructive impact of individualism on popular culture—her work remains the subject of intense controversy in the German-language press and is only gradually finding acceptance within the academic literary establishment.

Jelinek is a unique stylist, combining verbal components culled from cartoons, comic strips, Beatles songs, and science fiction films to shock readers out of their cultural complacency. Literary critics have praised the author's keen powers of observation and brilliant command of language but often object to her acerbic, reductive, arbitrary treatment of her characters and the vulgarity and artificiality of the world she created. *Lust*, for example, was condemned as pornography by some critics after its publication in 1989.

Jelinek has often spoken of her writing as an attempt to make apparent the economic and political structures that motivate people's values, attitudes, and behaviors. Socialization of youth to dependency, manipulation of popular tastes, and violence against women and children are dominant themes in her work. With few exceptions the settings and characters are unmistakably Austrian; the problems, however, are common to all industrialized societies.

**Marxist-Feminist Themes** Jelinek builds each of her fictions on a strong Marxist-feminist foundation. In novels such as *Women as Lovers*, *The Piano Teacher*, and *Lust*, her central themes involve female protagonists treated as commodities; usually they are victims of male-perpetrated crimes that include domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and human alienation. Accused by male critics for her coarse depiction of such acts, Jelinek has also received disapprobation from other feminists who condemn her depiction of female sexuality and masochistic behavior.

In addition to her characteristic graphic portrayal of brutality toward women, Jelinek is not hesitant about displaying her Marxist leanings. Her concern for the welfare of the working class within capitalist Europe is encoded within all her fiction. Both in her highly praised 1983 work *The Piano Teacher* and in *Women as Lovers*, Jelinek portrays human relationships as shaped by a dehumanizing economic system.

## Works in Critical Context

Jelinek's unique narrative style has been the subject of much critical attention. Feminist critics have praised her examinations of the exploitation of women in patriarchal societies and her commitment to exposing the violence

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Jelinek's famous contemporaries include:

**Peter Handke** (1942–): Austrian novelist and playwright whose works are considered avant-garde and controversial.

**Dean Koontz** (1945–): Best-selling American writer known for his suspense-thrillers.

**David Lynch** (1946–): American screenwriter and film director whose films are noted for their disturbing themes and surreal, nightmarish quality.

**Julian Barnes** (1946–): English novelist whose works touch on a broad range of contemporary concerns.

**Kathy Acker** (1947–1997): American novelist known for her experimental prose style and feminist writings.

**Salman Rushdie** (1947–): Indian-British novelist who is well known for *Satanic Verses*, which led to protests from many Muslims.

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Jelinek's works feature women who are the victims of crimes by men and who struggle to overcome the obstacles faced in a male-dominated world. Here are some other works with similar portrayals:

*The Color Purple* (1983), a novel by Alice Walker. This novel, set in the 1930s, explores the struggles of African American women in the southern United States, with graphic portrayals of the violence and exploitation faced by these women.

*The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), a novel by Margaret Atwood. In this novel about a dark future, women are subjected to the repressive practices of a male-dominated religious government.

*The Passion of Artemisia* (2002), a novel by Susan Vreeland. This novel tells the story of a woman overcoming a rape by her painting teacher and her subsequent struggles to forge a successful art career of her own.

perpetrated against women. Nevertheless, some female scholars have argued that Jelinek's plays and novels work against feminist causes because of their brutal depictions of female sexuality, masochism, and self-mutilation. Several male critics have concurred with this assessment, citing the cold and overly analytical nature of Jelinek's prose. Her 1989 novel, *Lust*, attracted a great deal of

critical controversy, with many reviewers arguing that the novel is a work of pornography.

Such criticism has caused the Austrian media to frequently refer to Jelinek as the nation's "best-hated author." Still, Jelinek has been consistently praised throughout her career for her skill with satire and political commentary, earning comparisons to such authors as Johann Nestroy, Karl Kraus, and Elias Canetti.

***Surprise Over the Nobel Prize*** When Jelinek was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2004, there was some surprise in literary circles that a writer whose work was largely unknown outside of the German-speaking world was so honored. Others remarked upon the darkly violent themes in her works, with their sometimes strident strain of feminism. *Progressive* reviewer Nina Siegal observed that Jelinek "wasn't an obvious choice" for the prestigious and lucrative prize. "Her dense, strident political satires exploring sexual perversion and social decadence aren't exactly mass-market fare. And because only a few of her novels have been translated, her work is largely unknown outside the German-speaking world," Siegal commented.

The announcement of the award was greeted by reactions ranging from confusion from those who were not familiar with Jelinek and her work, to either outrage or unqualified approval from those who knew her work well. The controversy included harsh criticism from publications such as the *Weekly Standard* and others who "claimed that her books contain more hateful fury than artistic virtuosity," observed a *New Yorker* reviewer. Others ridiculed the relative obscurity of her works. One of the Nobel panel's eighteen lifetime members resigned in protest.

Despite the outcry, Jelinek received the award based on what the Swedish Academy described as "her musical flow of voices and countervoices in novels and plays that with extraordinary linguistic zeal reveal the absurdity of society's clichés and their subjugating power."

***The Piano Teacher*** *The Piano Teacher*, first published in 1983, was viewed upon its publication as one of the author's best works, and that assessment still held true when an English translation of the novel was finally published in 1988. Carole Morin, in a review for *New Statesman and Society*, called the book "a reckless recital that is difficult to read and difficult to stop reading. The racy, relentless, consuming style is a metaphor for passion: impossible to ignore." Charlotte Innes termed the novel "a brilliant if grim exploration of fascism" in her *New York Times Book Review* assessment of a later Jelinek book. The general critical consensus is that the books that followed—especially the controversial *Lust* (1989; first published in English in 1992)—have failed to deliver on the artistic promise of *The Piano Teacher* and her earlier works. Like the novel, the film adaptation of *The Piano Teacher* written and directed by Michael Haneke was a critical success, winning the 2001 Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival.

## Responses to Literature

1. Before turning to writing, Jelinek trained as a musician. In what ways is her musical education evident in her writing?
2. Critics have noted that Jelinek's writings are based on her Marxist-feminist ideas. What types of Marxist and feminist ideas can you detect in her works? In what ways does she put these ideas forward? Are her works able to convince you that her ideas are correct?
3. The choice of Jelinek as a Nobel Prize winner caused quite a bit of controversy in the literary world. Some critics have claimed that Peter Handke would have been a better choice for an Austrian writer to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. Write an essay either supporting or opposing this claim.
4. Jelinek's writings have been labeled abrasive and even pornographic, and she has been noted for her graphic portrayal of brutality toward women. Jelinek also professes to be serving feminist goals with her writing. Write an essay identifying one or more of her feminist goals and analyzing how her writing style is either well suited or poorly suited for forwarding these goals.

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## ■ Juan Ramón Jiménez

BORN: 1881, Moguer, Andalusia, Spain

DIED: 1958, Santurce, Puerto Rico

NATIONALITY: Spanish

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

*Sad Airs* (1903)

*Platero and I* (1914)

*Spiritual Sonnets* (1916)

*Summer* (1916)

*Diary of a Newlywed Poet* (1917)

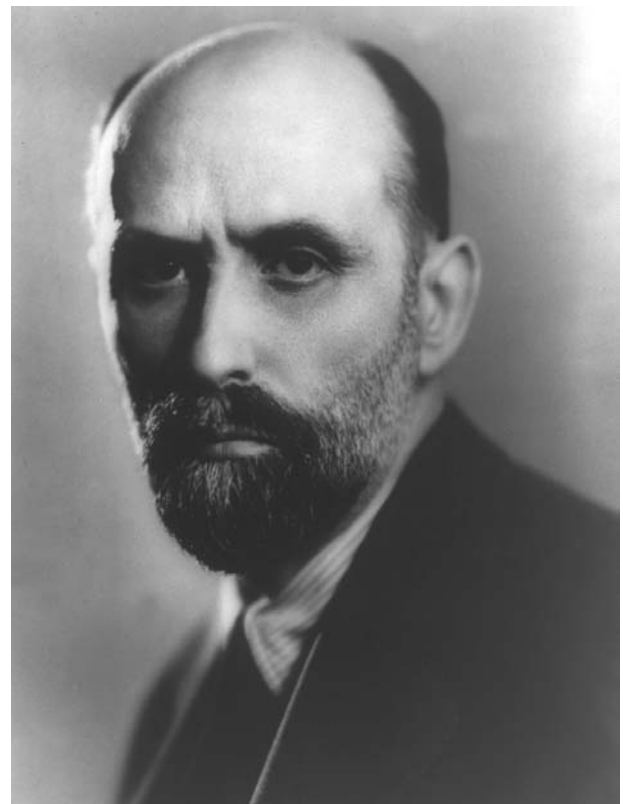
### Overview

Juan Ramón Jiménez dominated Spanish poetry for the first three decades of the twentieth century. At the outbreak of the Spanish civil war in 1936 he was still a figure of influence and importance. Later, in exile in the United States and Puerto Rico, he expanded his already considerable influence, making the acquaintance of such esteemed fellow poets as Robert Frost and Ezra Pound.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Early Privilege** Juan Ramón Jiménez Mantecón was born on December 24, 1881, to Victor Jiménez and Purificación Mantecón y Lopez Parejo. The Jiménez family operated a comfortable business as wine and tobacco merchants, with their own vineyards, ships, and warehouses, and a tobacco monopoly granted by the state. Such commerce enabled the young Juan Ramón to enjoy the upbringing of a typical Andalusian *señorito* (well-to-do young man).

**Unhappy School Years** In October 1893, after finishing primary school in Huelva, Jiménez entered the



Juan Ramón Jiménez *Jimenez, Juan Ramon, photograph. The Library of Congress.*

Jesuit Colegio de San Luis Gonzaga in Puerto de Santa María. The young poet found school gloomy and disturbing and filled the margins and blank pages of his textbooks with drawings and scribbled sentences. He studied his favorite subject, French, and read influential works such as Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*, in which Jiménez underlined passages that confirmed a penchant for solitude.

**Artistic Aspirations** In 1896 the teenage Jiménez fell in love with Blanca Hernández-Pinzón, the daughter of Moguer's judge. But Blanca's family, fearful of the impetuous youth who had a tyrannical temper and a penchant for playing with guns, discouraged the association. His father wanted him to be a lawyer, but the young Jiménez believed he had talent as an artist and wanted to be a painter. It was finally decided that he would begin the course of studies for prelaw at the University of Seville and at the same time take instruction in studio art. In autumn 1896 he enrolled in the university and began his art apprenticeship in the studio of Salvador Clemente, a genre painter from Cádiz. Jiménez showed himself an apt pupil in the impressionist style, with its blends of subdued blues, grays, whites, and greens. He continued to paint busily until 1900.

Jiménez once remarked that of the three great loves of his life—painting, poetry, and music—painting beckoned first when he was fifteen and then gave way a year or two later to poetry. His ambition to be a poet crystallized, and he immersed himself in lyrical verse. Early in 1897 the *Programa*, a Seville newspaper, accepted one of Jiménez's poems, and, thus encouraged, he joined a literary group in Seville called the Ateneo and began to send more poems to provincial magazines and newspapers.

**Early Poetry and the Modern Movement** Soon he enjoyed a good reputation in the city and started work on a book of poetry to be called "Clouds." The demands of poetry and painting left him no time for studies, and, upon failing Spanish history, he withdrew from the university at the end of the spring term to devote himself full-time, with the blessing of an indulgent family, to painting and writing. He collaborated on the reviews *Hojas Sueltas* and *Quincena*, and in 1899 *Vida Nueva*, a Madrid review, accepted his poem "The Beggar's Lovers" for publication. *Vida Nueva* also sent him, on the basis of his apparent concern with social problems, five pieces by Norwegian Henrik Ibsen, already translated into Spanish, which Jiménez polished into poetic prose. Thus began a lifelong interest in the art of translation. *Vida Nueva* published his Ibsen translations in January 1900, and the stage was set for Jiménez to go to Madrid. A postcard signed by poets Rubén Darío and Francisco Villaespesa was Jiménez's invitation to come to Madrid and assist in the task of revitalizing Spanish poetry. Needing no urging, he arrived in Madrid on Good Friday of

1900, to be swept up into the bohemian life of the *modernistas*.

**Colorful Versions and Revisions** His companions pointed out that the large amount of material in "Clouds" could easily be divided into two books, and he set about to follow their advice. The bohemian life did not suit Jiménez, and six weeks after his arrival in Madrid he was back in Moguer, busy separating and regrouping the poetry of "Clouds" into *Violet Souls* and *Water Lilies*. These, printed respectively in violet and green ink, were published in September 1900. Jiménez's father intensely disliked the effusive poetry and destroyed every copy he could get his hands on. The critical reception was almost equally negative.

**Phobic Years** Jiménez had been back in Moguer six weeks when, on July 3, 1900, his father died suddenly. The shock caused him to develop an abnormal fear of death. He believed that he, too, would die suddenly like his father, and, in order to prevent this occurrence, he insisted on always being near a doctor, or knowing where one was immediately available. This compelling need ordered all living arrangements for the rest of his life.

During the year following his father's death, Jiménez's symptoms of hypochondria mounted, and his family sent him to the sanatorium of Castel d'Andorte, near Bordeaux, to be placed under the care of Jean Gaston Lalanne, a noted authority on persecution complexes. The poet arrived at the sanatorium in the first part of May 1901. By the end of August he had left France and soon he settled down in Sanatorio del Rosario, a rest home in Madrid, where he formed a lasting friendship with the neurologist Luis Simarro.

In 1902, his next work, *Shadow Rhymes*, appeared. The collection was an improvement over Jiménez's first two books and met with critical success. For the next two years, Jiménez was happy; close to doctors and cared for by the sisters of the Sanatorio, he felt protected and cared for and was able to give full vent to his creative interests. Several fellow writers visited him, turning his rooms into a kind of literary salon, coming to talk literature and *modernismo*, the movement that had taken hold in Spain. They had also come to hatch the plans for a *modernista* review—to be called *Helios*, one of the most coherent and successful platforms for Spanish modernism. *Helios* (April 1903–May 1904) was carefully edited by Jiménez, who contributed translations as well as many unsigned pieces. In 1903 he also saw the publication of *Sad Airs*, which includes the poetry he wrote at the Sanatorio. Critics from José Ortega y Gasset to Darío praised it, and its success established Jiménez as a poet of undeniable talent.

**The Institución Libre de Enseñanza** Simarro, the neurologist Jiménez had met on the way to Bordeaux, began taking on boarders after the death of his wife in 1903. Jiménez delightedly signed on to stay with him.



Through Simarro, Jiménez came to know the work of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza. Founded in 1876 by Francisco Giner de los Ríos as a lay school at a time when all education was under the aegis of the Catholic Church, the Institución deeply affected the life of a liberal intellectual minority. Jiménez accompanied Simarro to its lectures and noted that they always came away with many new ideas. Through such contacts he gradually broadened his outlook and increased his intellectual concerns. In February 1904, Jiménez published *Faraway Gardens*, the last part of a trilogy that begins with *Shadow Rhymes* and includes *Sad Airs*.

**Productive Years of Personal Exile** When Simarro fell ill in the fall of 1905, Jiménez decided to return to Moguer. There he stayed for nearly seven years, living with his family in the semi-seclusion of their Andalusian village. Provincial exile in Moguer turned out to be, except for bouts of depression, incredibly productive for the poet. Jiménez wrote enough to fill several collections of poetry and one book of prose that were published beginning in 1908, and sufficient material remained to fill seven posthumous volumes. The work included *Platero and I*, which he began writing in 1906 and which was published in 1914.

In 1911 the Banco de España impounded the vineyards of the financially struggling Jiménez family. Jiménez took this situation as a warning that he might need to earn money, and since there were more economic opportunities in Madrid than in Moguer, he returned to the Spanish capital. Given his innate liberalism and his contact with Simarro and the Institución in 1903, Jiménez found himself quickly attracted to an offshoot of the Institución—the Residencia de Estudiantes, a dormitory set up in 1910 along the lines of a university college at Oxford or Cambridge. By 1912 it had been enlarged by three new buildings and was well on its way to becoming an important intellectual center in Spain and, to a certain extent, a cultural haven in Europe during World War I. Jiménez attended a lecture at the Residencia in the summer of 1913. In the audience was a twenty-six-year-old named Zenobia Camprubí Aymar. Jiménez fell in love at once, and a long courtship ensued. When Camprubí Aymar stipulated that their marriage take place in New York City, she unwittingly supplied the context for one of the most unusual books in modern Spanish poetry. *Diary of a Newlywed Poet* (1917) is a record in poetry of Jiménez's feelings and thoughts about his journey from Cádiz to New York and his stay in the United States. *Diary* had considerable influence on the poetry written in Spain during the next decade.

**Move to America** Jiménez and his wife lived in Spain after their marriage, but they had often talked of returning to America. The outbreak of the Spanish civil war gave them the motive to do so, and in August 1936 they sailed from Cherbourg to New York. After several teaching stints and moves, the Jiménezes moved to Puerto

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Jiménez's famous contemporaries include:

**Béla Bartók** (1881–1945): Hungarian pianist and composer who is recognized as one of the most significant musicians of the twentieth century and remembered for cofounding the field of ethnomusicology.

**Alexander Fleming** (1881–1955): Scottish biologist who shared the Nobel Prize in Physiology/Medicine for his discovery of penicillin as an antibiotic.

**James Joyce** (1882–1941): Irish expatriate author who is considered to be one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century.

**Helen Keller** (1880–1968): American author and activist who was the first deaf-blind person to graduate from college and who led an involved life as a champion for women's and workers' rights.

Rico in 1951 and remained there until their deaths. The return to a Spanish-speaking environment influenced the poet in the last few active years of his life. He donated his papers and books to the University of Puerto Rico at Río Piedras, taught a course on modernism there in 1953, and continued to write and publish poetry.

**Losing Camprubí Aymar** Camprubí Aymar, who had undergone an operation for cancer in 1951, worsened after a period of remission. She died on October 28, 1956, just three days after the Swedish Academy voted to award Jiménez the Nobel Prize in Literature. Jiménez became increasingly withdrawn and more or less ceased to write. He died on May 29, 1958.

## Works in Literary Context

**Enduring Life and Literary Influences** Early in his life, Jiménez had come across the verses of Rubén Darío, the influential poet from Nicaragua who had managed to inject new life into Spanish language poetry at the turn of the century. Jiménez formed a lasting friendship with Darío. He saw Valle-Inclán often, met Azorín and the playwright Jacinto Benavente (who, like Jiménez, went on to win a Nobel Prize), and became good friends with Gregorio Martínez Sierra, a dramatist who was later an influence on him. *Shadow Rhymes* (1902) reflects the influences of these *modernistas*.

Camprubí Aymar also had a large impact on the poet's life. Bilingual in Spanish and English, she was a cultivated woman who further acquainted him with the world of Anglo-American poetry, which after 1916 replaced French verse as the chief influence on his work. The poet's birthplace, Moguer, also inspired him: *Platero*

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Jiménez often featured death-related themes in his work. Here are some other works that center around the dead or death:

"Annabel Lee" (1849), a poem by Edgar Allan Poe. Poe's famous poem features a young man mourning his dead love who lies "in her tomb by the sounding sea."

*As I Lay Dying* (1930), a novel by William Faulkner. This masterful novel features intertwining narration by various characters involved in transporting the body of Addie Bundren to her burial site.

"The Snows of Kilimanjaro" (1936), a short story by Ernest Hemingway. A writer and adventurer lies dying of a gangrenous leg wound while bickering with his girlfriend and pondering the past in this classic Hemingway tale.

*and I* (1914) is a series of vignettes of small-town life and rural scenes in and around Moguer. Jiménez's Andalusian roots were, like William Butler Yeats's Irishness, a source of inspiration and pride.

**Evolving Style** In the years 1913 to 1916, Jiménez was making a transition in his poetic style. The sentimental and mournful voice of his traditional sonnets began to give way to brief, compressed poems in the manner of Emily Dickinson, whom he read for the first time in 1916. At the same time, under the influence of Shakespeare's sonnets, which he had undertaken to translate with his wife, he tackled a classical meter.

Jiménez then developed what he came to call "*poesía pura*" (pure poetry), or "*poesía desnuda*" (naked poetry). The style hinted at in *Summer* attained full development in *Diary* and offered the most important contribution of short lines, free verse, suppression of anecdote, and recurring nouns charged with multiple meanings (*rose, tree, woman*).

**Death Obsessions** In works such as *Eternities* (1918), Jiménez explores traditional themes of the poet to poetry; of poetry to the world; and of love, memory, and death. One aspect of Jiménez's abiding neurosis was his abnormal fear of death. In *Violet Souls* (1900) at times he leans dangerously toward an unhealthy attraction to a dead little body: "Elegiac," for instance, focuses on the work of worms as they eat away the small white face and burrow into the heart once inflamed by passion. One of his greatest triumphs, however, was to broach the ultimate theme of death and, in spite of his pathological morbidity, present it in humanistic and noble terms. He believed that life could not be meaningfully lived without the persistent awareness of death. As he says in *Poetry*

(1923), the cord that links one's life to life in general should bind one to death.

### Works in Critical Context

In his introductory speech awarding Jiménez the Nobel prize, Royal Academy member R. Granit asserted, "If ever there has been inspired use of words, it is in Juan Ramón Jiménez's poetry, and in this sense he is a poet for poets. This is probably also the reason why, within the whole Spanish-speaking world, he is regarded as the teacher and master."

**Platero and I (1914)** *Platero and I*, Jiménez's most universally acclaimed book, describes life in a small Andalusian town, as seen through the sensitive eyes of the poet/narrator and his inseparable companion, the woolly white donkey Platero. The book has been read with pleasure by schoolchildren, adults, and critics. Graciela P. Nemes, writing in 1961 essay, wrote that the book "enhance[s] the lesser people and the commonplace through an attitude toward nature and people, which speaks with the greatest tenderness that exists in the hearts of men." Michael P. Predmore, in a 1970 essay, calls it "one of the most famous prose poems in twentieth-century Spanish literature," and an "early masterpiece" of the author. He continues, "It has always been popular, even and especially among its critics, who unite unanimously in praising the artistic qualities of the work." The book has reached, after Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615), perhaps the widest audience of any work in Spanish literature.

### Responses to Literature

1. Jiménez sometimes allowed his preoccupations, phobias, delusions, and apprehensions of a dual personality to enter into his poetry. Study one poem where you find this to be the case and discuss what important questions about identity are raised in his work.
2. In *Spaniards of Three Worlds* (1942), Jiménez offers a balance of sarcasm and lyricism. He does so in caricatures, or portrait poems. Try your hand at a portrait poem: Choose a person to write about, someone you know personally who inspires you, or someone from the media who inspires your sarcasm. Write a portrait poem by including physical characteristics of the person, special features, bits of dialogue, or actions of the person to show your readers the person's character.
3. In his "pure poetry," Jiménez aimed for a stark style by stripping anecdote and obvious sentiment from his lines, and by making instead a heavy use of symbols. Before researching further, consider one most important object in your life. Why did you choose this object or image? What did it make you think of? What feelings come from the object/image for you?

What does your choice say about who you are? That is, how does your choice represent your personality? After deciding on your image, reconsider a Jiménez poem, paying close attention to one symbol. What do you think the item represents?

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## Samuel Johnson

BORN: 1709, Lichfield, Staffordshire, England

DIED: 1784, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama, nonfiction, criticism

MAJOR WORKS:

*Plan for a Dictionary of the English Language* (1747)

*The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749)

*Preface to a Dictionary of the English Language* (1755)

*The Idler* (1758–1760)

*The Patriot* (1774)

### Overview

Perhaps the best-known and most often-quoted English writer after William Shakespeare, Samuel Johnson ranks as England's major literary figure of the second half of the eighteenth century. He is remembered as a witty conversationalist who dominated the literary scene of London and the man immortalized by James Boswell in *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791). Known in his day as the "Great Cham (sovereign or monarch) of Literature,"



Samuel Johnson *Johnson, Samuel, photograph. The Library of Congress.*

Johnson displayed a vigorous reasoning intelligence, a keen understanding of human frailty, and a deep Christian morality.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

**Early Access to Books** Born in Lichfield in 1709, Johnson was the son of Michael Johnson, a bookseller, and his wife, Sarah Ford. The family lived above the bookstore, and Johnson literally grew up among books. He loved to read from an early age and often neglected to help with the shop so he could read. Thus, Johnson grew up with an access to books greater than nearly anyone else at his time in Great Britain, as there were no public libraries in the modern, open, free sense of the word, and book collecting was the milieu of the wealthy.

**Published First Translation** As a child, Johnson suffered from scrofula (a skin disease which is often a symptom of tuberculosis, a contagious bacterial infection of the lungs). The condition seriously affected his eyesight and disfigured his face for life. Despite the scrofula, he was educated at Lichfield Grammar School and later at Pembroke College, Oxford, but a shortage of funding forced him to leave the latter institution without a degree in 1729, after a residence of only thirteen months. After his father's death in 1731, Johnson lived in Birmingham, where he translated into French *A Voyage to Abyssinia*, by

Father Jerome Lobo, which he published anonymously in 1735.

In that same year, Johnson married Elizabeth Porter, a widow twenty years his senior. After a failed attempt at running a boarding school, Johnson went to London to make a career as a man of letters. Once in London, he performed editorial work for Edward Cave's *Gentleman's Magazine*, to which he submitted essays, poems, reviews, and a series of brief biographies. His most notable contributions appeared between 1740 and 1743 and were titled "Debates in Magna Lilliputia." These essays eloquently—perhaps too eloquently—re-created parliamentary proceedings and were widely accepted as authentic speeches of the great politicians of the day. At the time, Britain was ruled by the Germanic House of Hanover, whose kings left much of the governing to their ministers. Britain was in the midst of a time of rapid colonial and mercantile expansion abroad, and internal stability and literary and artistic achievement at home.

**Successful Poet and Prose Writer** In 1738, Johnson anonymously published his immediately successful *London: A Poem, in Imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal*, which contains protests against political corruption and the dangers of the London streets and describes the miseries of the unknown and impoverished author. His *Account of the Life of Mr. Richard Savage*, published anonymously in 1744, was the first of his prose works to captivate the public. Today, it is admired for its lively depiction of Grub Street life and is considered a milestone in the art of biography.

**Shakespeare and the Dictionary** Johnson next turned to Shakespeare's work, publishing his *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth* in 1745. *Miscellaneous Observations* also contains a preliminary proposal for a new edition of Shakespeare's plays, but Johnson laid the project aside after it was suggested that he compile a dictionary of the English language.

In 1747, he published his *Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language*, dedicating the work to Lord Chesterfield—who, in fact, cared little about the project. In 1749, Johnson published his second Juvenalian imitation, "The Vanity of Human Wishes," in which the personal vicissitudes of scholars, philosophers, and legislators from the modern and ancient worlds are used to illustrate the pitfalls of political ambition, the uselessness of military conquest, and the anguish that accompanies literary production.

**Launched Rambler** Beginning in 1750, Johnson published a semiweekly periodical, the *Rambler*, each issue of which comprised a single anonymous essay on contemporary literary and social conditions. Fervently believing that it is the writer's duty to make the world a better place, and to "redeem the time," Johnson crafted these essays in various forms: allegories, sketches of archetypal humans, literary criticism, and lay sermons. A few

days after the last issue of the *Rambler* appeared in 1752, Johnson's wife died.

**Dictionary Acclaimed** During the next few years Johnson confined his literary efforts to work on the dictionary and irregularly contributed to another weekly periodical, the *Adventurer*, published by John Hawkesworth. In 1755, Johnson and his secretaries finally finished the forty-thousand-word dictionary, which surpassed earlier dictionaries of its kind, primarily in precision of definition. The dictionary firmly established Johnson's literary reputation and led to his receiving an honorary MA degree from Oxford University. Lord Chesterfield, striving to make amends for his previous lack of regard, hailed Johnson as the supreme dictator of the English language. This action only provoked what is perhaps the most famous of Johnson's letters: a scornful rebuke of Chesterfield's self-serving praise and a defense of his own initiative and industry without the assistance of a patron.

Soon thereafter, Johnson once again focused his attention on Shakespeare, formally issuing his *Proposals for Printing the Dramatick Works of William Shakespeare* in 1756. Despite the commercial success of his dictionary, which nevertheless failed to relieve his money problems, Johnson continued to write essays, reviews, and political articles for various periodicals.

**Launched Universal Chronicle** From 1758 to 1760, Johnson contributed a regular weekly essay to the *Universal Chronicle*. These essays, appearing under the heading "The Idler," exhibit the moralist and social reformist perspectives of the *Rambler* pieces but also treat the lighter side of the human condition through comical character sketches. In 1759, informing his printer that he had "a thing he was preparing for the press" to defray the expense of his mother's impending funeral, Johnson wrote *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* (1759) in the evenings of one week.

**The Literary Club** In 1762, King George III conferred upon Johnson a pension of three hundred pounds Sterling a year, thereby relieving him of the drudgery of hackwork. The next year, his accidental meeting with Boswell in Thomas Davies's bookshop in Covent Garden inaugurated one of the most famous literary companionships in history. Boswell's diary entry recording the event noted that Johnson's "conversation is as great as his writing." In 1764, Johnson gladly concurred with Joshua Reynolds's proposal for the founding of what still ranks as the most famous London dining club of all time. Simply called The Club, it was later known as the Literary Club.

Besides Johnson and Reynolds, the original members were Edmund Burke, Topham Beauclerk, Bennet Langton, and Oliver Goldsmith. Eventually Boswell, Edward Gibbon, Charles James Fox, and several others were admitted as members. At meetings of the Club, Johnson uttered many of his renowned epigrams and opinions.

Indeed, Reynolds once admitted that the Club was formed primarily to give Johnson a forum to express himself verbally and in company.

The following year, Johnson's *Plays of William Shakespeare* appeared in eight volumes—eleven years after being proposed. A lifelong student of Shakespeare, Johnson corrected textual corruptions, elucidated obscurities of language, and examined Shakespeare's textual sources.

**Beyond Literature** Although he continued writing prologues and dedications for friends, Johnson no longer devoted his work exclusively to problems of literature and ethics. Instead, he expounded his essentially pragmatic political philosophy in a series of pamphlets on the power politics of English and French colonialism, most notably in *The False Alarm* (1770), *The Patriot* (1774), and *Taxation No Tyranny; an Answer to the Resolutions and Address of the American Congress* (1775). The last-named polemic, perhaps his most vociferous outburst against colonial American claims, was written in reply to the resolutions passed by the American Continental Congress of 1774. In 1775, the American colonies official began revolting, marking the beginning of the American Revolution and the eventual loss of the North American colonies that would soon make up the United States of America.

Enjoying unprecedented leisure in the mid-1770s, Johnson extensively toured Great Britain and visited the Continent. Having traveled to Scotland and the Hebrides with Boswell in 1773, Johnson published his impressions two years later in *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775), which describes the customs, religion, education, commerce, and agriculture of eighteenth-century Highland society. Johnson also traveled with his good friends Henry and Hester Thrale to North Wales in 1774 and to France in 1775.

**Poet Biographies** In 1777 Johnson agreed to write biographical prefaces for an “elegant and accurate” edition of the works of English poets, ranging from the time of John Milton onwards. Instead, his prefaces were separately issued as *The Lives of the English Poets* (1781). This ten-volume work contains fifty-two essays and a wealth of biographical material.

In 1783, Johnson had a paralytic stroke that left him seriously debilitated until the spring of the following year. After visiting his native Lichfield for the last time in the summer of 1784, he returned to London in November, and although his physical condition had considerably worsened, his mind remained alert. Johnson died on December 13, 1784.

## Works in Literary Context

Johnson—poet, dramatist, journalist, satirist, biographer, essayist, lexicographer, editor, translator, critic, parliamentary reporter, political writer, story writer, sermon writer, travel writer, social anthropologist, prose stylist, conversationalist, Christian—dominates the eighteenth-

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Johnson's famous contemporaries include:

**Voltaire** (1694–1778): Voltaire was a French Enlightenment writer and philosopher known for his wit and outspoken support of social reform. His works include the satire *Candide* (1759).

**Edmund Burke** (1729–1797): Burke was an Anglo-Irish author, philosopher, and statesman who contributed to the development of conservative political thought. His works include *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770).

**David Hume** (1711–1776): Hume was a Scottish philosopher and economist considered to be one of the most influential thinkers in Western philosophy. His books include *Essays Moral and Political* (1744).

**Benjamin Franklin** (1706–1790): Franklin was a multi-talented American who contributed to science, politics, and publishing. He began publishing his annual *Poor Richard's Almanack* in 1733.

**Henry Fielding** (1707–1754): Fielding was an English author who wrote humorous and satirical novels. His novels include *Joseph Andrews* (1742).

**Edward Gibbon** (1737–1794): Gibbon was an English historian best known for his monumental work, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1766–1788).

**James Boswell** (1740–1795): Boswell was a Scottish author best known as Johnson's companion and biographer. Boswell published his *Life of Samuel Johnson* in 1791.

century English literary scene as his contemporary, the equally versatile and prolific Voltaire, dominates that of France. When Johnson's name began to be known, not long after the deaths of Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope, no challenger arose during the next forty years for the title of preeminent English man of letters. His work encompassed many ideas and themes, including the choice of life.

**Choice of Life** One theme that emerges in some of Johnson's early work is the inevitable unhappiness of human existence whatever choice in life is made. In “The Vanity of Human Wishes,” a verse satire based on the Roman poet Juvenal's tenth satire, Johnson considers mankind's yearnings for the various gifts of power, learning, military fame, long life, beauty, even virtue, and gives a melancholy account, with individual examples, of the misfortunes attendant upon each. The themes of the prose narrative *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, a moral tale set in Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia) and



## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Johnson often used satire to critique modern social and political conditions and to point out the weaknesses in human nature. Here are some other well-known satirical works:

*Gulliver's Travels* (1726), a novel by Jonathan Swift. This novel satirizes the foibles of the human condition through a parody of travel writing.

*The Devil's Dictionary* (1911), a nonfiction work by Ambrose Bierce. This book gives reinterpretations of English words and terms that are meant to satirize political doubletalk.

*The Simpsons* (1989–), an animated television series created by Matt Groening. This television show satirizes American culture and society through a parody of middle-class family life.

Egypt, focused on a princely young hero escaping with his sister and the poet Imlac from the secluded innocence of the Happy Valley and tries out various schemes of life.

**Age of Johnson** The eighteenth century has often been called “the Age of Johnson.” To be sure, he had notable contemporaries—Edmund Burke, David Hume, Edward Gibbon—but their literary abilities, formidable as they were, moved in a narrower circle of concerns. Henry Fielding, Samuel Richardson, and Laurence Sterne received and deserve great acclaim as the founding fathers of the English novel, but their contributions to other areas of writing are less noteworthy.

Almost as prolific as Johnson and as varied in his interests was Horace Walpole, who sometimes expressed aristocratic disdain for the lowborn Johnson, though he never seems to have impinged greatly on Johnson's consciousness. Walpole might be argued to have made a greater impact than Johnson on the following century, in the legacy of the “Gothic” romance and Victorian pseudo-Gothic architecture. But no one has ever suggested calling the later eighteenth century “the Age of Horace Walpole.” It is not surprising that the standard bibliographies of studies in eighteenth-century English literature show Johnson to have been their most popular subject, followed at some distance by Swift and Pope, and at a longer one by Fielding, Daniel Defoe, John Dryden, and William Blake.

Though the phrase “the Age of Johnson” is less used than it once was, Samuel Johnson, whose life spanned most of the eighteenth century and whose writings embraced an astounding variety of genres, remains a central figure in the literary history of the time.

## Works in Critical Context

Johnson's reputation as a man of letters rests as much on his life and personality as it does on his writings. This is evidenced by the scope, depth, and sheer bulk of the corpus of Johnsonian criticism, much of which is pure character analysis. Boswell's account of his life, particularly from the time of their meeting onwards, was perhaps most responsible for “Johnsonizing” England, and it fostered an image of Johnson as a gifted and original writer and masterly conversationalist.

**Contemporary Criticism** Johnson was revered by his contemporaries as a skilled poet, brilliant lexicographer, and sensitive moralist. Critics hailed him as the “new” Alexander Pope upon publication of “The Vanity of Human Wishes,” and Johnson's dictionary, initially well received, remained a standard until the appearance of the *Oxford English Dictionary* well over a century later. Equally, *Rasselas* supplemented the popular moral themes of Johnson's earlier *Rambler* and “Idler” essays while satisfying the tastes of eighteenth-century readers for what Pope termed “impressive truth in fashion drest.”

Critics continued to admire most of Johnson's works in the decade following his death, but in time commentators began to fault Johnson for what they considered his highly Latinate, formal, and overly balanced prose style, as well as for his wordiness and narrow critical method. Some critics singled out *Lives of the Poets*, chastising Johnson for his harsh appraisal of John Milton and his prejudicial assessments of other works and authors, notably Thomas Gray and his *Odes*.

### Changing Reputation in the Nineteenth Century

By the early nineteenth century, Johnson's folk image—the man of Boswell's *Life*—had come to dominate critical thinking, leaving little room for studies of the works themselves. William Hazlitt evidenced this approach when he wrote in 1818, “His good deeds were as many as his good sayings. . . . All these, and innumerable others, endear him to the reader, and must be remembered to his lasting honour.” Indeed, this sort of assessment was typical until the last years of the nineteenth century.

When critics did focus on Johnson's works, they generally turned to his dictionary and *Lives of the Poets*. Leslie Stephen favorably remarked that the dictionary “was a surprising achievement, and made an epoch in the study of language,” while Thomas Babington Macaulay mirrored the views of his contemporaries when he appraised *Lives of the Poets*: “They are the judgments of a mind trammelled by prejudice and deficient in sensibility, but vigorous and acute.” Similarly, the *Rambler* essays were dismissed as didactic lay sermons, and other prose works were labeled “unreadable.” Thus, by the turn of the century, interest in Johnson's literary works was at a low point, but the man himself continued to loom large in the minds of readers.

### Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Assessment

The bicentenary of Johnson's birth in 1909 sparked a

major revaluation of the Johnson canon. Throughout the twentieth century, critical emphasis shifted from the amusing idiosyncrasies and the pointed commentaries of the man to his ethical and moral standards, his appraisals of the human condition, and the breadth, strength, and method of his reasoning. Some scholars noted that Johnson's writings on morals closely anticipated the theories, if not the language, of Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud, while others ranked Johnson just below Alexander Pope and John Dryden as masters of heroic-couplet verse. Even *Lives of the Poets*, the most favorably received of Johnson's works, was reconsidered. No longer perceiving Johnson as a strictly neoclassical critic, scholars contended that he employed an empirical approach in his criticism; some critics have even cited Johnson as the father of New Criticism.

Recently, commentators have turned to Johnson's Shakespearean work, countering a common nineteenth-century claim that, in the words of Heinrich Heine, "Garrikk got a better hold of Shakespeare's thought than Dr. Johnson." Likewise, Johnson's political tracts, long viewed as abusive expressions of his conservative prejudice against the rights of the people, are seen today as an extension of his lifelong concern with political morality and order.

Today, after a long eclipse, Johnson is once again preeminent in the history of English letters, and mention of his name commands reverence in the English-speaking world. According to Malcolm Muggeridge, "Dr. Johnson will go on being remembered, not so much for his achievements as a writer as for the mysterious quality of greatness that he exudes."

## Responses to Literature

1. At one point in his career, Johnson was granted a pension by the king of England. How did this work-free source of income change Johnson's approach to writing? Does a writer like Johnson benefit from a pension or does it have a negative effect on his work? Write a paper that outlines your findings and conclusions.
2. Johnson wrote in many different genres and had an extremely diverse literary output. Is it better for a writer to focus on only one or two types of writing, or does a more diverse career such as Johnson's produce better writing all around? If you were a writer, would you focus on one form or cast a wide net? Create a presentation that outlines your theories.
3. Choose a favorite author and write a short literary and critical biography modeled after Johnson's style in *Lives of the Poets*.
4. Write a story about a modern celebrity that uses satire to make a political or moral point.

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## Ben Jonson

BORN: c. 1572, London, England

DIED: 1637, Westminster, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Drama, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

*Poetaster* (1601)

*The Alchemist* (1610)

*Workes* (1616)

*Timber; or, Discoveries* (1641)

## Overview

Ben Jonson was a prolific Elizabethan dramatist and a man of letters who profoundly influenced the coming Augustan age through his emphasis on the principles of Horace, Aristotle, and other classical thinkers. While he is now remembered primarily for his satirical comedies, he also distinguished himself as a poet, a preeminent writer of masques, a careful defender of his work, and the originator of English literary criticism. Jonson's professional reputation is often obscured by his personal notoriety; a bold, independent, and aggressive man, he fashioned for himself an image as the sole arbiter of taste,



Ben Jonson Jonson, Benjamin, photograph. Public Domain.

standing for erudition and the supremacy of classical models against what he perceived as the general populace's ignorant preference for the sensational. While he influenced later writers in each genre that he undertook, his ultimate influence is considered to be a legacy of literary craftsmanship, a strong sense of artistic form and control, and his role in bringing, as poet Alexander Pope noted, "critical learning into vogue."

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

***An Anachronistic War Hero Finds Trouble with the Law*** Jonson was born in London shortly after the death of his father, a minister who claimed descent from Scottish gentry. Although his family was poor, he was educated at Westminster School under the renowned antiquary William Camden. He apparently left school unwillingly when called to work with his stepfather as a bricklayer. He then served as a volunteer in the Low Countries in the Dutch war against Spain; reportedly, he defeated a challenger in single combat, stripping his vanquished opponent of his arms in the classical (and by that point quite anachronistic) fashion. The war Jonson fought in was a part of the bloody European wars of religion, in particular, the Eighty Years' War (1560s–1648)—in which the increasingly Calvinist (a particularly stern version of Protestantism) Netherlands fought to throw off the yoke of Catholic Spanish rule. Jonson's

participation reflected the strong anti-Catholic sentiment that had prevailed in England since King Henry VIII's break with the Vatican in 1533, with the notable exception of the reign of Queen Mary I from 1553 to 1558.

Jonson returned to England by 1592 and married about three years later. It seems that the union was unhappy and produced several children, all of whom Jonson outlived. In the years following his marriage, he became an actor and also wrote numerous "get-penny entertainments" (financially motivated and quickly composed plays), as well as working on emendations and additions to Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1592). By 1597 he was writing for Philip Henslowe's theatrical company. That year, Henslowe employed Jonson to finish Thomas Nashe's satire *The Isle of Dogs* (now lost), but the play was suppressed for alleged seditious content and Jonson was jailed for a short time. In 1598 the earliest of his extant works, *Every Man in His Humour*, was produced by the Lord Chamberlain's Men with William Shakespeare—who became Jonson's close friend—in the cast. That same year, Jonson fell into further trouble after killing actor Gabriel Spencer in a duel, narrowly escaping the gallows by claiming benefit of clergy (meaning he was shown leniency for proving that he was literate and educated).

**"War of the Theaters"** Shortly thereafter, writing for the Children of Queen's Chapel, Jonson became embroiled in a public feud with playwrights John Marston and Thomas Dekker. In *Cynthia's Revels* (1601) and *Poetaster* (1601), Jonson portrayed himself as the impartial, well-informed judge of art and society and wrote unflattering portraits of these men, who counterattacked with a satiric portrayal of Jonson in the play *Satiromastix; or, The Untrussing of the Humorous Poet* (1602). This brief dispute became known as the "War of the Theaters"; interestingly, scholars speculate that the dispute was mutually contrived in order to further the respective authors' careers. In any event, Jonson later reconciled with Marston and collaborated with him and George Chapman in writing *Eastward Hoe* (1605). A joke at the king's expense in this play landed him once again, along with his coauthors, in prison. Once freed, however, Jonson entered a period of good fortune and productivity. He had many friends at court, and James I valued learning highly—in a society where most art depended heavily on the patronage of the wealthy and powerful, this meant quite a bit. Jonson was frequently called upon to write his popular, elegant masques, such as the *Masque of Blacknesse* (1605). During this period, he also produced his most successful comedies, including *The Alchemist* (1610) and *Bartholomew Fayre* (1614).

**Self-Proclaimed Poet Laureate** In 1616 Jonson published his *Workes*, becoming the first English writer to dignify his dramas by terming them "works," and for this perceived presumption he was widely ridiculed. In that year, Jonson assumed the responsibilities and

privileges of Poet Laureate, though without formal appointment. From 1616 to 1625 he primarily wrote masques for presentation at court, collaborating frequently with famed poet, architect, and stage designer Inigo Jones.

Misfortune, however, marked Jonson's later years. A fire destroyed his library in 1623, and when James I died in 1625, Jonson lost much of his influence at court, though he was named city chronologist of London in 1628. Later that year, he suffered the first of several strokes that left him bedridden. Meanwhile, Jonson's collaborative relationship with Jones grew strained as the latter's elaborate theatrical spectacles increasingly overshadowed Jonson's dialogue and songs, and in 1631 the two parted ways. Jonson produced four plays during the reign of Charles I, but none of these was successful. The rest of his life, spent in retirement, he filled primarily with study and writing; at his death, two unfinished plays were discovered among his mass of papers and manuscripts. Though Jonson left behind a financially depleted estate, he was nevertheless buried with honor in Westminster Abbey.

### Works in Literary Context

Although later writers like John Dryden are often credited with innovating what we now call "literary criticism"—a critical analysis of the merits, demerits, and meanings of any piece of literature—Jonson is now seen as the first major figure to work in the genre. Indeed, in both his published works and private conversations, Jonson was willing to criticize both the poetic style and the personal lives of contemporary poets and dramatists. However, Jonson is notable because he attempted to hold himself to his own high standards, and in so doing, wrote poetry that utilized what has become known as a "plain style" of poetry. This style of poetry demonstrates Jonson's artistic control and continued to be influential on poets for several hundred years.

**Jonson's Criticism** Poet William Drummond became acquainted with Ben Jonson and recorded a number of Jonson's observations regarding poetry and poets of his day in his text *Conversations*. Drummond's notes offer many insights into Jonson's views of poetry and other poets. In one moment, Jonson memorably remarked "That Shaksper wanted [i.e., lacked] Arte"—one of several assessments of others that helped define his own ideals. He also said that some of Drummond's poems "smelled too much of schooles"—a statement balancing the one on Shakespeare by indicating that the art Jonson prized required skill but should also seem natural and unstrained.

*Timber; or, Discoveries* (1641), one of Jonson's most original works, in fact, represents the first English formulation of literary principles as applied through practical critical observation. In this he directly anticipated and

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Jonson's famous contemporaries include:

**William Shakespeare** (1564–1616): An English dramatist often credited as the most important writer in the history of the English language.

**Miguel de Cervantes** (1547–1616): A Spanish author often credited with having written the first novel, *Don Quixote*.

**Robert Ayton** (1570–1638): A Scottish poet notable because he was one of the first Scottish authors to write in the English language.

**Guy Fawkes** (1570–1606): The English would-be assassin of King James I, Fawkes has become a symbol for anarchy, notably in the graphic novel (later adapted into a film) *V for Vendetta*.

**John Carver** (1576–1621): This Pilgrim leader was also the first governor of the Plymouth Colony, which is now mostly Massachusetts.

influenced Dryden, commonly held to be the father of English criticism.

**Poetry as the Application of Principles** Ben Jonson's significance as a poet is hard to overestimate. His influence helped transform English verse. His "plain style" made him a crucial figure in a central tradition, but his deceptively complex works reward close reading. Sophisticated, self-conscious, and strongly influenced by the Greek and Roman classics, his writing nonetheless rarely seems foreign or artificial. His vigorous and colloquial style exemplifies both wide reading and a deep interest in reality.

Jonson's "plain style" was neither artless nor utterly clear; instead, it avoids both sublimity and vulgarity. It was meant to communicate, to have an effect, and it gives his poetry a directness, practicality, seriousness, and force that loftier, lower, or more complicated phrasing would obscure. Its tone is often forthright, its emphasis ethical, although Jonson generally rejects priggish preaching. He mocked cant and jargon and usually avoids them himself. His poems—whether elegies, songs, celebrative verse, or short love lyrics—reflect a style of plainness and simplicity that he argued for in his criticism. Skillfully polished, such poems as "To Penshurst," "Come, My Celia," and "To the Memory of My Beloved Master William Shakespeare" exemplify the artistic control he valued so highly.

### Works in Critical Context

Jonson was recognized as one of the foremost men of letters in his own time and at his creative height rivaled

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

During the “War of the Theaters,” Jonson used his drama to take digs at opposing dramatists and to characterize himself as a fantastic judge of character and art. These kinds of jabs in literature are common. Here are a few works of art that contain sharp criticism of other artists and men of letters:

*Candide* (1759), a novel by Voltaire. In his most famous book, Voltaire does not attack one writer specifically but an entire era of writers—writers from the Enlightenment, perhaps mostly Gottfried Leibniz—who argue that all that happens in the world will ultimately be for the best for all. Essentially, Voltaire rebukes this idea by putting his main character, Candide, through a number of trials, none of which turn out well in the end.

*Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses* (1895), an essay by Mark Twain. Twain argues in his characteristically wry manner that James Fenimore Cooper, in a single page of his novel *Deerslayer*, committed 114 of the possible 115 literary errors a writer can make. The rest of the essay is equally biting.

*The Battle of the Books, and Other Short Pieces* (1704), essays by Jonathan Swift. In this text, Swift pits ancient writers against contemporary writers and targets specifically a contemporary almanac writer, Partridge, and, in the process, the art of almanac writing itself for its ineffective methods of predicting, for instance, whether any given day will be rainy.

Shakespeare in popularity. Yet, his reputation soon declined; his plays in particular, though judged undeniably literate, were considered obsolete not long after their era, more exercises in scholarship than inventive entertainment. Modern-day appraisals of Jonson, however, have provoked a considerable resurgence of interest in his work.

**Dismissed as “No Shakespeare”** His earliest comedies derive from Roman comedy in form and structure and are noteworthy as models of the comedy of humors, in which each character represents a type dominated by some ruling obsession. Jonson’s later dramas, however, were dismissed fairly early on—most famously by John Dryden, who called them mere “dotages.” It was Dryden who first undertook an extensive analysis of Jonson. While generously likening him to Virgil and calling him “the most learned and judicious writer which any theatre ever had,” Dryden’s comments also signaled the start of a decline in Jonson’s reputation, for Dryden’s observations included a comparison of Jonson and Shakespeare—one that nodded admiringly toward Jonson, but bowed adoringly before Shakespeare. This compar-

ison colored Jonson’s reputation for more than two hundred years, fueled by nineteenth-century Romantic critics, who found Jonson lacking in imagination, delicacy, and passion.

**A Resurgence among the Modernists** T. S. Eliot, writing in 1919, praised Jonson’s artistry, arguing that Jonson’s reputation had been unfairly damaged by critics who, while acknowledging his erudition, ignored the power of his work. He wrote: “To be universally accepted; to be damned by the praise that quenches all desire to read the book; to be afflicted by the imputation of the virtues which excite the least pleasure; and to be read only by historians and antiquaries—this is the most perfect conspiracy of approval.” With Eliot and the other proponents of literary modernism began a revaluation of Jonson, who benefited from modernist reaction against Romantic sensibility, and who began to be appreciated on his own terms.

**Workes in Contemporary Criticism** The late twentieth century has seen a renewal of critical appreciation of Jonson. Approaches to his work have come from a variety of directions and have taken many different forms, with many of them focusing on the *Workes*. For instance, literary critic Thomas Greene suggests that “in a sense, almost everything Jonson wrote attempts in one way or another to complete the broken circle, or expose the ugliness of its incompleteness.” In contradistinction, scholar Mark Bland argues that “the idea of the *Workes* as a self-portrait, for all its immediate appeal, is not one that ought to be imposed upon that volume. No one would wish to deny Jonson his sense of identity or his voice; the *Workes*, however, has an ideal ethical form (like a masque), that seeks to engage and elevate the moral consciousness of the reader through its evolving structure—a process that is separate from the character of the author or the contents of the texts as such.” Whether we take the *Workes* as a self-portrait pointing to its own partialness or as a programme of moral edification, we are at the very least fortunate that contemporary literary criticism has again discovered the value of all Jonson’s works, collected or otherwise.

## Responses to Literature

1. Read Jonson’s poem “Still to Be Neat.” The ideas in this poem are very similar to those in Robert Herrick’s “Delight in Disorder.” Read Herrick’s text. Which author do you think handles this subject more efficiently? Point out specific techniques that each author used that affected your judgment of the texts.
2. Read Jonson’s poem “On My First Son.” Jonson calls his son his “best piece of poetry.” Everybody has something that they consider their best work, and few consider their “best piece of poetry” to be an actual poem. Write a poem describing your finest



achievement, following the structure of rhyming couplets that Jonson uses.

3. Read Jonson's *Poetaster* and Mark Twain's *Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses*. Each of these satirizes authors who were alive and thriving when the pieces were written. In a short essay, analyze the kinds of criticism each author makes of his contemporaries. Would you say one picks on the author's personal life more than his work? How would you say these differences change the overall effect of the pieces?
4. Read Jonson's "To Penshurst." This poem exemplifies Jonson's "plain style" of writing and recalls classic literature with its epic themes combined with its earthy beauty. Choose a place you love—your house, a park, a zoo, a mall—and attempt to imitate Jonson's plain style and the progression of descriptions in a poem in which you describe this place that is so important to you.

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## James Joyce

BORN: 1882, Dublin, Ireland

DIED: 1941, Zurich, Switzerland

NATIONALITY: Irish

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

*Dubliners* (1914)

*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916)

*Ulysses* (1922)

*Finnegans Wake* (1939)

### Overview

James Joyce is considered the most prominent English-speaking literary figure of the first half of the twentieth century. His short-story collection and three novels redefined the form of modern fiction and have inspired countless writers in his wake.

### Works in Biographical and Historical Context

*One Child among Many in Dublin, an Irish Exile in Paris* James Augustus Aloysius Joyce was born on February 2, 1882, in Dublin, Ireland, to John Stanislaus



James Joyce Joyce, James, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Joyce and Mary Jane Murray Joyce. He was the eldest of what his father estimated as “sixteen or seventeen children,” only ten of whom survived infancy.

After graduating from University College Dublin in 1902, Joyce left Ireland for medical school in Paris. He viewed the flourishing Irish literary revival with a mixture of anxiety and indifference. Both the strong nationalism, with its emphasis on the revived Gaelic language, and the accompanying mysticism were unacceptable to him. Unlike many Irish writers of the period, who rejected the literature of England, Joyce was sensitive to the major achievement of the English literary tradition that spanned the eight centuries in which Ireland was under English rule and the accomplishment of William Shakespeare within that tradition. He also cautiously accepted the necessity of writing in the tongue of the conquerors in order to broaden his intellectual perspectives. In his home country, the Irish, persecuted for centuries by the British, were pushing aggressively for independence from British rule. Many fellow Irish writers chose to dramatize this quest for freedom in their work. Joyce, however, was determined to establish himself in the European mainstream, believing that he could not function as an artist in Ireland and that the only suitable response he could make was to be an exile.

**Teaching English in Italy** His mother’s serious illness caused his return home in 1903. When he left Ireland permanently in 1904 for Italy, Joyce took with him a young woman, Nora Barnacle. She would remain his companion for the rest of his life on the Continent and they would have two children together, although he refused to marry in a religious ceremony. (They eventually legalized their marriage in a civil ceremony in 1931.) In the decade between 1904 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Joyce and Nora lived principally in Trieste, Italy, where he taught English.

**Success in a Shattered World** For James Joyce, the year the world was thrown into turmoil was also the beginning of his success as a writer, with the publication of his short-story collection *Dubliners*—which examines the middle-class Irish Catholics known to himself and his family—and the completion of his first novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), as well as his beginning to work on *Ulysses*. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is at once a portrayal of the maturation of the artist, a study of the vanity of rebelliousness, and an examination of the self-deception of adolescent ego. It is often considered a study of the author’s early life. As Joyce was writing and finding some appreciative readers, the world around him was falling apart. The Great War, as World War I was initially known, meant that he and his family were now enemy aliens in Italy.

**At Work on a Masterpiece** In 1915 the Joyces were granted permission to leave Trieste for neutral Zurich,

Switzerland. Soon thereafter, back in Ireland, the Irish Republican Brotherhood staged what became known as the Easter Rising during Easter week of 1916. They seized key Dublin facilities and declared an independent Irish republic, but were put down by British forces after six days of fighting. Three years later, a full-scale guerilla war, known as the Irish War of Independence, broke out, which eventually compelled the British to make some concessions to the Irish and led to the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922.

Most of *Ulysses* (1922), the novel for which Joyce is most enduringly remembered, was written during the war years in Zurich. In 1920, Joyce and his family moved to Paris. Among the expatriate Americans living there between the wars was Sylvia Beach, who published *Ulysses* under the imprint of her bookstore, Shakespeare and Co. Using Homer’s *Odyssey* as a framework, Joyce depicts in *Ulysses* the events of a single day in Dublin—June 16, 1904. Seedy details of urban life caused the novel to be banned from the United States until December 1933, when Judge John M. Woolsey delivered the legal verdict that *Ulysses* was not obscene; it was published in the United States in early 1934, twelve years after Sylvia Beach’s Paris edition had appeared.

**Finnegans Wake and the Dark Years Following** Following the international praise heaped on *Ulysses*, Joyce gained the financial patronage of heiress-activist-editor Harriet Shaw Weaver and afterward was able to devote himself exclusively to writing. He spent nearly all of his remaining years composing his final work, *Finnegans Wake* (1939). Meant to be the subconscious flow of thought of H. C. Earwicker, a character both real and allegorical, *Finnegans Wake* is literally a re-creation of the English language. In this masterpiece of allusions, puns, foreign languages, and word combinations, Joyce attempted to compress all of Western culture into one night’s dream.

Though free from poverty, these years were darkened by the worsening insanity of Joyce’s daughter Lucia and by several surgical attempts to save his own failing eyesight. After the publication of *Finnegans Wake* in 1939, the year war once more broke out in Europe, Joyce fled Paris and the approaching turmoil of World War II. A stay in the south of France eventually led to the Joyces being admitted into Switzerland again, once Lucia was hospitalized and the rumor that Joyce was a Jew was dismissed. Three weeks after arriving in Zurich in 1941, however, Joyce died on the operating table during surgery on a perforated ulcer.

## Works in Literary Context

**The Quintessential Modernist** Critics have come to see the year 1922, with the appearance of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, and German poet Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus*, as the

culminating moment of modernism. Although James Joyce avoided association with artistic groups or literary movements, the characteristics distinguishing his works—dislike of institutions devoted to preserving the status quo, faith in the humanity of individuals, and a deep interest in stylistic experimentation—reflect the concerns animating the works of all the major artists of the period. He is, and was even for many readers of his own moment, the quintessential modernist.

*An Irish Home Seen from—and as—“Away”* A striking characteristic of Joyce’s different novels and short stories is their near-obsession with Dublin, perhaps the more striking given Joyce’s own long expatriation. In dealing with a world fractured by WWI and then the onset of the WWII, Joyce certainly could have been forgiven for seeking comfort in memories of childhood and home—if that were what he had done. Instead, Joyce’s returns to Dublin are famously unsentimental, even mocking, and his depictions of his own family are outright cruel at times. In a sense, he looks back to Dublin and a home life there not as “home,” a place of familiarity and comfort, but as “away,” a place that may be clearly, even coldly, seen in a more or less objective light. Perhaps, though, it is Irish culture that has the last laugh here, since the ironic portrayals of Dublin and of family life that strike some readers as cold or cruel are, after all, representatives of a grand Irish tradition of sharp-tongued, even ferocious self-mockery.

Joyce’s influence has been immense. Elements within the styles of authors as different from one another as Irish novelist and playwright Samuel Beckett, modern American novelist William Faulkner, English fiction writers Malcolm Lowry and John Fowles, and contemporary American novelists Thomas Pynchon and John Irving identify them as some of those most overtly shaped by Joyce’s works. But no author today can begin to compose without confronting in some way the impact on modern literature exerted by Joyce’s new methods of composition, and, consequently, no reader today can take up a work of modern fiction without feeling the effects and echoes of Joyce’s influence.

### Works in Critical Context

Few writers have as secure a claim to be the major figure of the modernist period in literary history as James Joyce does. Richard Ellmann summarizes the author’s impact on twentieth-century letters: “We are still learning to be James Joyce’s contemporaries, to understand our interpreter.” Critics are unanimous in their praise for Joyce’s artistry while acknowledging the difficulty of his works. Eloise Knowlton comments about *Dubliners*: “The stories . . . take a coldly objective, scrupulously true view of their objects, accomplish a vivid and swift capturing of a single, seemingly accidental moment, and lack an explanatory authorial voice (a caption) that might pin down a specific meaning: a lack that perpetually frustrates students who expect a definite, readable meaning to a tale.”

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Joyce’s famous contemporaries include:

**Georges Braque** (1882–1963): Braque was a French artist and cofounder with Pablo Picasso of the cubist movement in painting.

**Umberto Boccioni** (1882–1916): Boccioni was an Italian artist, who was influential in the futurist artistic movement, which rejected the past and focused on speed and technology.

**Mina Loy** (1882–1966): Loy was a British artist and writer, as well as a creator of three-dimensional collages. She turned away from futurism toward modernism.

**Igor Stravinsky** (1882–1971): Stravinsky was a Russian composer who collaborated with ballet choreographers, including Sergei Diaghilev and George Balanchine. He is well-known for his works *The Firebird* and *The Rite of Spring*.

**Virginia Woolf** (1882–1941): Woolf was an English author well-known for her modernist novels and a member of the influential Bloomsbury literary group in London.

Similarly, Keith Cushman writes about *Ulysses*: “It is odd that a novel with such a reputation for consummate artistic design should also be universally recognized to be formally problematic. Every serious reader of *Ulysses* must grapple with the apparent divergence of matter and manner, of surface and symbol. . . . Our image of Joyce almost requires that we equip *Ulysses* with a grand design, but any such design is apt to leave out the sheer exuberant messiness of the novel.”

*Ulysses* Responses to *Ulysses* have been as varied as the different facets of the novel itself, although the antihero figure of Leopold Bloom is so universally beloved that a day named for him (June 16) is celebrated by Joyce enthusiasts around the world (and especially in Dublin, Ireland, where the novel takes place): Bloomsday. Attempting to trace Joyce’s effects on the development of a “world modernism,” literary critic César Augusto Salgado notes several “central Joycean themes—the interplay between the Homeric and the Orphic, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, death and resurrection.” Salgado also describes *Ulysses* as “an anarchical avant-garde work” driven by a “realist imperative to represent a plurality of characters with technical conciseness by filtering their representation and characterization through their own language.”

*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* David Daiches argues that in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* “Joyce . . . has given us one of the few examples in

## COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

According to Marvin Magalaner's *Time of Apprenticeship*, James Joyce explained his choice of setting to his friend, Arthur Power: "For myself, I always write about Dublin, because if I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the heart of all the cities of the world. In the particular is contained the universal." Here are some other works in which a specific city plays an important, universally revealing, role.

*City of God* (2002), a film directed by Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund. This Academy Award-nominated movie follows a boy growing up in a slum of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; it is based on the 1997 novel of the same name by Paolo Lins.

*Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), a novel by George Orwell. This debut novel is heavily autobiographical, chronicling an artistic life lived in poverty in two great European cities.

*Palace Walk* (1988), a novel by Naguib Mahfouz. The first story in the "Cairo Trilogy" by the Nobel Prize-winning novelist, this novel examines the life of a middle-class family in Cairo just after World War I.

*A Private Life* (2004), a novel by Ran Chen. Written by one of China's leading female authors, this coming-of-age novel traces a girl's maturation in Beijing during the 1980s and 1990s.

*Tales of the City* (1976), a novel by Armistead Maupin. This novel, originally published as a newspaper serial, tells the story of a group of neighbors in San Francisco, with its thriving alternative culture.

English literature of autobiography successfully employed as a mode of fiction. As autobiography, the work has an almost terrifying honesty; as fiction, it has unity, consistency, probability, and all the other aesthetic qualities we look for in a work of art. . . . *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is perhaps the most flawless of all Joyce's work. The welding of form and content, the choice of detail that seems inevitable once it has been made, the brilliant yet unobtrusive style, these and other qualities give the work a wholeness, a unity, and a completeness possessed by hardly a handful of works in our literature." Looking back at initial responses to the piece, literary scholar Brandon Kershner suggests that in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* "Joyce's technique was so convincing that the [early] reviewers had to admit that something beyond conventional realism was at work."

### Responses to Literature

1. Joyce wrote about Ireland and the Irish, although he lived abroad for almost all his adult life. What stylistic

features of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* do you think can be attributed to this expatriation? That is, how did being outside of Ireland affect the way Joyce saw and wrote about his native land? Explore a thesis through detailed analysis of concrete passages in Joyce's text.

2. *Ulysses* is famously patterned on Homer's *Odyssey*, replacing the ancient Greek hero of that epic poem with a modern antihero. Research the emergence of the "antihero" in literature, and suggest several reasons why that figure may have emerged and gained popularity when it did. What are some possible cultural impacts of an embrace of the antihero?
3. James Joyce decided to write in English at a time when many Irish writers chose to write in Gaelic instead. Write an essay analyzing his reasons for writing in English, seen by many Irish of the period as the language of the colonizer.
4. Many readers see *Ulysses* as the epitome of modernist style. What ways of seeing the world are reflected in the emergence of this style, and how does this manner of experiencing reality differ from that associated with modernism's literary predecessors? Explore a thesis through detailed analysis of concrete passages in Joyce's text.

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